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FOUR MONTHS BESIEGED

THE STORY OF LADYSMITH

This Edition is intended for circulation only in India and the British Colonies.

SIR GEORGE STEWART WHITE, V.C., G.C.S.I.

From a Photograph by Window & Grove

Frontispiece

Macmillan's Colonial Library

Four Months Besieged

THE STORY OF LADYSMITH

BEING UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

FROM

H. H. S. PEARSE

THE 'DAILY NEWS' SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

106596

WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM SKETCHES AND PHOTOGRAPHS MADE
BY THE AUTHOR

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PREFACE

THE siege of Ladysmith will long remain in the memories of the age. The annals of war furnish the record of many fierce struggles, in which men and women have undergone sufferings more terrible and possibly shown a devotion rising to sublimer heights. But the Boer War of 1899-1900 will mark an epoch, and throughout its opening stage of four months the minds of men, and the hopes and fears of the whole British race, centred upon the little town in mid-Natal where Sir George White with his army maintained a valiant resistance against a strenuous and determined foe without, and disease and hunger and death within, until, to use his own words, that slow-moving giant John Bull should pass from his slumber and bestir himself to take back his own. For that reason alone the story of Ladysmith will remain memorable. But it is a story which is brilliant in brave deeds, which tells of danger boldly faced, of noble self-sacrifice to duty, in calm endurance

of many and growing evils—a story worth the telling. Yet so far it has been told only in the necessarily disjointed telegrams and letters of the press correspondents in the town. Native runners who were captured and otherwise went astray, and the ruthless pencil of the censor, were accountable for many gaps. Two or three of the letters contained in the following pages escaped these perils, and were published in the columns of the *Daily News*. The rest of the book now appears for the first time.

The volume consists of pages from the letters and diaries of Mr. Henry H. S. Pearse, the Special Correspondent of the *Daily News*. Mr. Pearse was in Natal when the war broke out, and he was in Ladysmith during the whole of the siege. He was fortunate enough to enjoy good health throughout, and though he had some narrow escapes he was never hit. His letters contain a complete story of the siege.

April 1900.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

The declaration of war—Sir George White and the defence of Natal—The force at Glencoe—Battle of Talana Hill—General Yule's retirement—Battle of Elandslaagte—Useless victories—Enemy's continued advance.

BEFORE taking up the history of the siege proper it will be well here to pass briefly in review the events which led up to the isolation and investment of Ladysmith. When war was declared by the Government of the Transvaal in its despatch of the 9th October 1899, it found Her Majesty's Government in very great measure unprepared. A month earlier, however, reinforcements of 10,000 troops had been ordered to Natal from India and elsewhere, and the major part of these were already in the Colony. General Sir George White, who had arrived at Durban on 7th October, had strongly advocated the abandonment of the northern district of Natal, but allowed himself to be overborne by the urgent representations of Sir W. F. Hely-Hutchinson, who believed the withdrawal would involve grave political

results. Sir William Penn Symons believed that the districts in question could be defended by a comparatively small force, and he was allowed to make the experiment. At that time there were with him at Glencoe three battalions of infantry, a brigade division of the Royal Artillery, the 18th Hussars, and a small body of mounted infantry. The enemy crossed the borders immediately upon the expiry of the term stipulated in the ultimatum, and on the 20th October was fought the battle of Talana Hill.

This first battle of the campaign demonstrated at once the soundness of Sir George White's views. General Symons's little army worthily maintained the military traditions of their race, and in the face of a terrible fire from modern rifles, in the hands of the stubbornest of foes, rushed the enemy's position and swept him from the heights. But victory demanded heavy toll. The gallant commander nobly expiated the mistaken judgment which had led him so seriously to underrate the strength of the invaders, and nearly forty officers killed, wounded, and taken prisoners, figured on a list of about 430 casualties. So heavy a price was paid for a brief success and the knowledge that the enemy was too strong to make it safe to hold the Glencoe position longer.

General Yule, who now took command of the column, abandoned his camp on the 22nd October, and withdrew by a circuitous route to Ladysmith,

which was reached on the 26th. In the meantime, however, on the 21st, the Boers marched from the north-west, having cut the railway and captured a train of supplies at Elandslaagte to the north of Ladysmith. Sir George White therefore ordered out a force, under General French, to clear them from the line and to restore communication. Here again the hostile positions were stormed with reckless gallantry, and the Boers were swept back in headlong flight, suffering heavy losses. But again our loss, especially in officers, was very serious, and again it soon became apparent that victory, quite apart from the price of it, had not improved our position. The Boers, thrust back for the moment at one point, steadily continued their advance. General White's force was again engaged on the 24th October, when, in order to prevent the enemy crossing the Newcastle road from west to east, and falling on the flank of General Yule's retiring column, an attack was made in force upon the enemy at Rietfontein, near Elandslaagte, and the Boers, after six hours' fighting, were driven from the hills.

The object aimed at was thus secured. Whether, had the effort been pushed home, a definite check might at this stage have been imposed upon the Boer advance, is doubtful. Stopping where it did, it did not prevent the steady and unceasing movements of the enemy to surround Ladysmith. One more fight and they were to circle the town in a

ring of metal which was long to withstand all the blows that could be levelled against it. The battle of Lombard's Kop, or Farquhar's Farm, as it is officially styled, ended in disaster to the British arms, and drew tight the threads in the entanglement of Ladysmith. The evil fortunes of the day were described vividly by Mr. Pearse in a letter written on the following day.

CHAPTER II

LOMBARD'S KOP AND NICHOLSON'S NEK

General White forced to fight—The order of battle—Leviathan—The Boers reinforced—A retrograde movement—How Marsden met his death—Naval guns in action—A night of disaster—Who showed the white flag?—A truce declared—A humiliating position.

October 31.—If the action on Rietfontein, or Pepworth's Farm ridges, a week ago was the great score for us that official reports represent, in that it checkmated all possible efforts of the Boers to intercept Brigadier-General Yule's column on its march from Dundee, there can be no doubt that the tables were turned upon us effectually yesterday. Not only did our attempt to beat one of the enemy's columns in detail, and capture the heavy Creusot guns that had been harassing us, fail through misdirection, but when attacked in turn by Boer reinforcements, our troops were untimely ordered to abandon a position that they had held for four hours without serious loss, and this gave moral, if not material victory to the enemy. Successful in every fight up to that point, we are now in the humiliating position of

finding ourselves practically invested by a Boer force that will not attack except by artillery fire at long range, and whose leader has the power temporarily, at any rate, to choose the fighting ground that suits Boer tactics best if we decide to take the offensive. Not only so, but our little army here has suffered a great disaster in the loss of two gallant regiments, one of which had only ten days earlier gained for itself proud distinction by being first to crown the heights of Talana, near Dundee, where British infantry proved worthy of its most glorious traditions. As a purely defensive measure, if nothing more, the fight of yesterday was forced upon us. Like some other operations in this brief but eventful campaign, it came too late, but, whether timely or or not, a battle was inevitable unless we meant to sit down tamely and be battered at.

Yesterday morning, long before daybreak, our force was on the move, intent upon outflanking positions which the Boers held two days earlier. Colonel Grimwood, with one brigade consisting of the 1st and 2nd King's Royal Rifles, the Leicestershire and the Liverpool battalions, took up a position on open ground near Lombard's Kop, supported by a regiment of cavalry, the Border Mounted Rifles, and the Natal Carbineers with three batteries. A fourth battery was posted on a green kopje almost directly in line between Lombard's Kop and Rietfontein Hill. Colonel Ian Hamilton, with the second infantry brigade, consisting of the Gordon Highlanders, Rifle Brigade,

Manchesters, and 1st Devons, formed a strong reserve behind the long ridge connecting these points with their left on the Newcastle road, where the Imperial Light Horse were held ready for action when the proper time should come.

At four o'clock in the morning our infantry were all in position for the fight, as it had been originally planned. Half an hour later they exchanged shots with a few Boers scattered about kopjes in their front, and from that moment, until nearly noon, they remained practically under fire, never budging an inch, but remaining immovable, except when a change of front became necessary to meet the Boer reinforcements, and that was effected by an advance. Up to that point everything seemed to be going in our favour. When there was daylight enough for gunners to see clearly, the 42nd Battery, posted at the eastern end of a green kopje that forms an irregular spur of Rietfontein Hill, but at a much lower elevation, opened fire on that ridge where the Boers had planted Long Tom.

It was interesting to watch shot after shot fall nearer the mark around it as the gunners picked up the range, until one shell struck and burst close to "Long Tom's" embrasure. Then the battery took to firing shrapnel, which were so well timed that one could see projectiles from the six guns in succession bursting at intervals along Rietfontein's level crest, which must have been raked from end to end with a shower of shrapnel bullets. The enemy's leviathan

sent two shots at this battery, without effect, and then turned its fire upon Ladysmith town again, not with malicious intent, perhaps, but aiming to hit either the balloon or the railway station, where, in addition to naval guns, there happened to be stores of forage and other things that might easily have been set aflame by shells.

Notwithstanding this demonstration, our force was making steady progress towards an envelopment of the main Boer position at half-past seven in the morning. Immediately after that, however, prospects changed with the appearance of formidable reinforcements for the Boers, marching apparently from the direction in which a large camp had been seen two days earlier. They came into action on our right flank with a brisk rifle fire, followed by the deep notes of artillery. In intervals between the regular roar of field guns came the sledge-hammer "thud! thud! thud!" from an automatic gun, which Tommy Atkins, with his aptitude for expressive phrases, promptly christened "Pom! Pom!" and that name sticks to it with unpleasant associations, for the Boers had not only one but many automatons of the same pattern. Like the heavier field-piece, "Pom! Pom!" throws shells that burst badly, but throws them with great accuracy, so that scores of shots in rapid succession fell among our batteries whenever they advanced to a fresh position, or changed ground in hope of keeping down that harassing fire.

At this time the Border Mounted Infantry and Natal Carbineers made frequent dashes to secure advantageous points, and the Boers were at one time so hard pressed that they gave ground hurriedly before an attempt of the 60th Rifles to gain a rough crest which took the long hollow behind Lombard's Kop in reverse. Then the enemy's reinforcements falling back somewhat threatened our right flank, and Sir George White, reluctant to prolong his already attenuated line, met that movement only by sending the Carbineers round Lombard's Kop, and bringing up the Imperial Light Horse in support.

About this time the Gordon Highlanders and Manchester battalion were drawn forward from Hamilton's Brigade to the green tree-fringed kopje, on the ridge of which our 42nd Battery still maintained its position, playing effectively upon "Long Tom." It looked as if Sir George meant to reinforce his fighting line, and try a decisive counter-stroke, by throwing all the weight he could against the Boer left wing, which was either wavering or executing some wily movement that had the appearance of a retirement. But unluckily at this critical moment the 60th Rifles and Leicestershire men began to fall back from the position they had gained, which was immediately occupied by Boer riflemen, and the 60th, exposed to a storm of bullets from three sides, came across open ground in very loose formation. We presently learned that the order had been sent for them "to retire on the

balloon," Sir George White having apparently resolved upon concentration by a retrograde movement.

Receiving a message in the words quoted, men naturally assumed that it meant a hasty retreat and not a retirement by successive lines of resistance. In some cases nerves overstrained by hours of inaction gave way, and a few men threw down arms or equipment in a momentary panic, abandoning even their Maxim gun for a time. This, however, was quickly checked by the example of cool comrades, who, spreading out in obedience to commands from their officers so that there might be wide intervals for the shots to pass through, walked slowly and steadily across the open veldt, where bullets were raining like hailstones. In that retirement Major Myres, of the 1st Battalion King's Royal Rifles (60th), fell mortally wounded. Young Marsden, of the same battalion, going to the Major's assistance, knelt beside him, and bent over as if to bind up a wound. In that position he remained motionless so long that Lieutenant Johnson, who had been firing steadily with a wounded soldier's rifle until twice hit himself, went to see if he could give any help. He found his brother subaltern dead in the act of binding up a wound as he knelt over the dying field-officer's body. At that moment Lieutenant Johnson received his third wound, and had to be carried from the field by ambulance men.

Mounted infantry of the King's Royal Rifles and

Leicestershire Regiment, with Natal and Border Mounted Rifles, covered this retirement until it passed beyond the new line formed by Gordons and Manchesters, so that Colonel Grimwood's Infantry Brigade, looking rather like broken troops in the loose irregularity of every company, was not called upon to rally or turn to face the enemy, but marched straight back towards the balloon, "Long Tom" opening fire upon them as they crossed a ridge, with marvellously exact knowledge of the range. Three shells burst close to groups of the 60th, many men being hit.

At that moment, however, the Boer gunners' attention was diverted to another point, where, from hills just in front of the town, and facing Rietfontein, Captain Lambton's 12-pounders opened. It was as great a surprise for us as for the Boers. We saw the shell explode just in front of "Long Tom's" epaulement, and heard a cheer from spectators, scores of the townspeople having gathered on a slope by Cove Hill to watch the scene, among them a crippled gentleman who has to be wheeled about in a Bath-chair. Nobody who does not know what sailors will accomplish in spite of difficulties could have believed that Captain Lambton would bring his guns into action so soon after reaching Ladysmith, and especially, as we heard afterwards, as one had been upset by a shell from "Long Tom" as it was being drawn across level ground slowly by a team of oxen. Evidently, however, the mishap had done no

harm, for the bluejackets were manning two 12-pounders that showed no sign of damage, and both of them were making excellent practice. At the third round it planted a shell in the enemy's battery, and the fifth put "Long Tom" out of action for a time by disabling some of its gunners. Sir George White's gradual withdrawal of his forces to positions prepared for defence was therefore not harassed by shell fire from beyond the range of our own field batteries.

Quite apart from these operations, but intended to fit in with them, was the despatch of a flying column late on Sunday night to turn the enemy's right flank or cut off his line of retreat in the direction of Van Reenan's Pass. For either purpose, two battalions of infantry, though they might be the bravest and the best, with a mountain-battery of 7-pounders carried on mules, did not seem quite adequate, but Major Adye, of the Royal Irish Rifles, who acted as staff-officer guiding the column, was confident of success, and glad of the chance to be with two such battalions as the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the Gloucesters in such an enterprise.

Possibly all might have gone well with it but for a deplorable accident. In the dead of night some boulders rolling down from a hill startled the transport and mountain-battery mules, which stampeded, taking with them nearly all the reserve rifle ammunition. As to what happened after that, accounts vary greatly. Few of the Gloucester men or Royal Irish

Fusiliers got back to tell the story, except as wounded men on parole, and they had not seen the whole thing through. It seems certain, however, from concordance of evidence, that the Gloucesters and Fusiliers, instead of outflanking the Boers, were actually between two strong bodies of Free State men, when they seized a strong position and established themselves there. At any rate, they were attacked in turn soon after daybreak by Boers who crept up the slopes in rear, firing on them from both flanks—some say all round. Notwithstanding this, the thousand men held their ground against odds until nearly every round of ammunition had been expended, and the casualties numbered nearly a hundred and fifty killed or wounded.

Both regiments begged that they might be allowed to charge the rough slopes from which the ceaseless stings of rifle-fire came, and the Fusiliers, whose colonel would have led them willingly enough, had their bayonets fixed, when some one hoisted the white flag, and by this act the remnants of two gallant regiments became prisoners of war. "Flags of truce!" said an "old brag" who recounted the story, with tears in his voice; "I wish they would leave the damned rags at home, or dye them all khaki colour, so that neither Dutchmen nor us could ever see them."

News of that disaster travelled fast. It was told on the battlefield in front of Ladysmith two hours later, and it probably had some effect on the fortunes

of a fight that cannot be recalled by Englishmen with unmixed satisfaction. The result may be regarded as a drawn battle, in that each side remained at the finish in possession of its own position, but on us who watched every phase, first with confidence and then with increasing anxiety, the impression made was a very unpleasant one, closely akin to humiliation.

The Boers were left in command of heights on which, if given time, they may plant artillery to shell the town and camp with a fire to which we can make no effective reply until the quick-firing naval guns of heavy calibre and long range are mounted. Bluejackets have been working hard to that end all day, unmolested by the enemy, who have declared a truce for twenty-four hours in order that the wounded of both sides may be placed in comparative safety.

General Joubert has sent to us an ambulance with wounded under parole from the captured column, and in exchange his surgeons have taken a similar number of Boer wounded from our hospitals. All who have come in speak highly of the treatment they have received at the enemy's hands.

CHAPTER III

LADYSMITH INVESTED.

The exodus of the townsfolk—Communications threatened—Slim Piet Joubert—Espionage in the town—Neglected precautions—A truce that paid—British positions described—Big guns face to face—Boers hold the railways—French's reconnaissance—The General's flitting—A gauntlet of fire—An interrupted telegram—Death of Lieutenant Egerton—"My cricketing days are over"—Under the enemy's guns—"A shell in my room"—Colonials in action—The sacrifice of valuable lives.

OCTOBER closed without further hostilities, and its last day was uneventful in a military sense, though full of forebodings in the town, because all knew that the Boers were taking advantage of a brief armistice to bring up reinforcements. On this last day of the month civilians eager to get away from Ladysmith crowded every train. Writing on November 1st, Mr. Pearse said:—

All Saints' Day is observed with some strictness by Boers who do not show similar veneration for other festivals in the Church Calendar. There have at any rate been no hostilities to-day, but from Captain Lambton's Battery on Junction Hill, where the naval 4.7-inch quick-firing gun is being mounted, we have by the aid of the signalman's powerful

telescope watched a significant Boer movement going on for hours. We can see them among the scrubby trees between Lombard's Kop and Umbulwaana (or Bulwaan as it is more generally called), and hurrying off behind that hill along the road that leads southwards. That road cuts the railway not more than six or seven miles out, and their movement threatens our line of communications that way, unless we can manage to check it by judicious use of cavalry and mounted troops. The flight of townsfolk southward continues. They do not even trouble about luggage now, but lock their doors and clear off. Half the houses are empty, and many shops closed.

It was early shown that the enemy had not undertaken the war in a half-hearted manner. He let no possible opportunity escape to better his position; and in the choice of means he was not inclined to risk his reputation for "slimness." On this point Mr. Pearse has a good deal to say in his next letter:—

November 2.—For two whole days after the battle of Lombard's Kop there was absolute cessation of hostilities, and this lull the Boers turned to account in a manner very characteristic. There can be hardly any doubt that we might have taken advantage of it also to safeguard our line of communications by posting a force where it might have checkmated one of the enemy's obvious moves. Anything would have been better than the inaction, which simply allowed the Boers to mature their own

plans and put them into execution without risk of interference from us. That might almost have been foreseen when General Joubert on 31st October hit upon a characteristic plan for finding out what was the exact state of affairs in Ladysmith, and we, with a delightful naïveté, suspecting no guile, seem to have played into his hands. It will be remembered that the most painful incident of "Black" or "Mournful Monday" was the surrender of all but a company or two of the Gloucesters and Royal Irish Fusiliers, which with a mountain battery had been detached to turn the enemy's flanks, with consequences so humiliating and disastrous to us. Under pretence of treating the wounded from this column with great consideration, Joubert sent them into camp here, taking their parole as a guarantee that they would not carry arms again during this campaign. With the ambulance waggon was an escort of twenty Boers, all wearing the Red Cross badge of neutrality. Their instructions were to demand an exchange of wounded, and on the plea of being responsible for the proper care of their own men, they claimed to be admitted within our lines. Such a preposterous request would not have been listened to for a moment by some generals, but Sir George White, being anxious apparently to propitiate an enemy whose guns commanded the town, full as it was of helpless women and children, yielded that point, and so the ambulance with its swaggering Boer escort came into town neither blindfolded nor

under any military restrictions whatever. Among this mounted escort Ladysmith people recognised several well-known burghers, who were certainly not doctors or otherwise specially qualified for attendance on wounded men. They were free to move about the town, to talk with Boer prisoners, and to drink at public bars with suspected Boer sympathisers—all this while they probably picked up many interesting items as to the number of troops in Ladysmith, the position of ordnance stores and magazines, and the general state of our defences, which were chaotic at that moment. One among the visitors was particularly curious about the names of officers who dined habitually at the Royal Hotel mess, and very anxious to have such celebrities as Colonel Frank Rhodes, Dr. Jameson, and Sir John Willoughby pointed out to him. Does anybody in his senses believe that such careful inquiries were made without an object, or that the Red Cross badge was regarded as a sacred symbol sealing the lips of a Boer as to all he had seen and heard in Ladysmith?

When Joubert's artillery began shelling the town their fire was directed on important stores, the locality of which could only have been indicated to them by secret agents, and on places where officers are known to assemble at certain hours. These may all have been merely strange coincidences, but, at any rate, they are noteworthy as showing that in some way, whether by accident or cunning design,

General Joubert's gunners were able to profit by the truce that was agreed upon without any exact stipulation on either side as to its duration. The tacit understanding seems to have been that both forces should have time to collect their wounded and bury their dead.

It is certain that the Boers took a little more time than was necessary for this purpose, and turned it to good use for themselves by strengthening the earthworks behind which "Long Tom" is mounted, while we in turn were enabled to get a second naval gun of heavy calibre into position before the bombardment began again. The necessity for doing this was probably chief among reasons which kept our artillery silent during the last two days, though it seemed to mere spectators that a chance was thus being given for the enemy to mount batteries on heights that commanded nearly every part of our camp.

To make this perfectly clear without the aid of a map showing contours of all ridges and hollows is very difficult, and one can only attempt to give in words a rough idea of the general position. If the reader will bear in mind what a horse's hoof inverted looks like, he may get a mental picture of Ladysmith and its surroundings—the heels of the horse-shoe pointing eastward, where, five miles off, is the long, flat top of steep Bulwaan, like the huge bar of a gigantic horse-shoe magnet. The horse's frog approximately represents a ridge behind which, and

facing Bulwaan, but separated from it by broad stretches of meadow, with the Klip River winding a serpentine course through them, between high banks, is Ladysmith town. Between the frog and the horse-shoe lie our various camps, mostly in radiating hollows, open either to the east or west, but sheltered from cross fires by rough kopjes of porphyritic boulders that have turned brown on the surface by exposure to sunshine. Bushy tangles of wild, white jasmine spring from among these boulders with denser growth of thriving shrubs bearing waxen flowers that blaze in brilliant scarlet and orange, and the coarse grass that begins to show on every patch of earth between the rocks is dotted with clusters like dwarf petunias, or purple bells of trailing convolvulus. A rich storehouse this for the botanist, whose contemplative studies, however, might be rudely disturbed by the shriek and boom of shells bursting about him, for, as I have said, the enemy's guns command most of these ridges, though they cannot always search the hollows in which our camps are as much as possible hidden.

The horse-shoe, in its irregular curve, is dotted here and there with outposts, whose duty it is to keep the enemy's sharpshooters from getting within rifle range of our artillery positions encrusting the ridges at several points like nails of the horse-shoe. Without locating them exactly, one may say that the Naval batteries are on rough eminences of the northern heel, facing Rietfontein Hill, where the

Creusot gun, known as "Long Tom," is mounted behind earthworks at a range of 6800 yards, which is well within compass of the *Powerful's* 12-pounders and at least 3000 yards less than the extreme distance at which shells from her 4.7-inch quick-firing guns would be effective.

Positions for field batteries are prepared at other points round the wide sweep, but only to be occupied as occasion may arise, and therefore one does not care at present to locate them more precisely. The enemy, having heavy artillery of various calibre mounted on Bulwaan, is able to enfilade certain posts held by our infantry pickets on the heels of the horse-shoe, but there are folds among the rocky kopjes where men can lie comparatively screened from shells, which at that distance give timely notice of their coming, as sound travels rather faster than the projectiles do at the end of their flight.

We have outposts on Intombi or Maiden's Castle, which forms the horse-shoe's southern heel, others stretching westward thence to a gap in the toe of the shoe, through which a wood runs nearly due west until it branches off to the Drakensberg Passes in one direction and Maritzburg in the other, and pickets on the north-western and northern heights, with a detached post at Observation Hill, an elongated kopje outside the general defences, overlooking a wide valley of mimosa scrub towards Rietfontein, which is the enemy's main stronghold, commanding

as it does the railways to Van Reenan's Pass in the west, and to Newcastle in the north. Except for a distance of two miles from Ladysmith, therefore, both these railways are in the hands of the Boers, who can use them as uninterrupted lines of communication with the Orange Free State and the Transvaal respectively. That they were being so used to some purpose we had reason for believing, during the two peaceful days following the one which from its associations has come to be known among soldiers as "Mournful Monday." Standing on the naval battery, one could watch Boers hard at work preparing positions near Lombard's Kop, and along the crest of Bulwaan, for artillery that was probably then being brought by railway from Laing's Nek, and at the same time columns of Boer horsemen were moving behind Bulwaan southwards, evidently intent upon cutting our own lines of communication. That they would be allowed to accomplish it without a timely effort on our part to prevent them seemed inconceivable.

For most of us it was a shock to realise that ten or twelve thousand British soldiers could be shut up by an army of Boer farmers before any attempt at a counter-stroke had been made. The mobility of our enemies, however, gives them a wonderful advantage in such movements over a force that consists mainly of slow-moving infantry, and unless opportunity is taken to attack them promptly, when they may be beaten in detail, their power for mis-

chief is very far-reaching. Possibly Sir George White was quite right to put his trust in defensive tactics, knowing that he could hold Ladysmith against all attempts of the Boers to capture it notwithstanding their numerical superiority, but it is none the less vexatious and unpleasant to find ourselves beleaguered and bombarded.

Whether the enemy had power to invest Ladysmith effectually, and keep a strong force across our lines of communication would only be ascertained by a reconnaissance. Directly and without any warning except to officers commanding detachments, a force assembled at the earliest hour this morning (Nov. 2). There was so little fuss that soldiers lying in tents on bivouac slept undisturbed by the clanking of bits as horses were saddled, or the rumble of wheels when a battery moved to their places in the column. Artillery, 5th Lancers, 18th Hussars, Natal Carbineers, Border Mounted and Natal Mounted Rifles get together silently, the volunteers vieing with regulars in this proof of discipline, which indeed comes natural to men many of whom know by sporting experience on the veldt that silence is a virtue. General French takes command of this mobile little force, and at two o'clock it moves out through the darkness for a reconnaissance along the Colenso Road, where it comes in touch with the enemy soon after daybreak. A brisk skirmish against Boer riflemen, who as usual have been quick to occupy commanding kopjes; showers of shrapnel

hurled among them from our field battery; a few shells tearing up the dust in clouds in their distant camp; and two of our own Lancers hit, makes up the story of this affair, which serves to show conclusively that communication by road in that direction is barred, if not effectually cut. General French therefore brought his column back, reaching Ladysmith in time to take train for Durban, handing over the cavalry command before he left to General Brocklehurst.

That train was the last to get through, and even then had to run the gauntlet of rifle and artillery fire from Boers who were on both sides of the line. An hour later the railway was cut by the Boers, whose light guns completely commanded a defile through which the line passes; and at two o'clock telegraphic communication stopped short in the middle of an important despatch, while private and press messages innumerable await their turn. The thread of that interrupted telegram will probably not be taken up for many days, and we realise that our isolation is complete. Communications might have been kept open for days longer by an energetic use of artillery and mounted troops, but now it is too late to reopen them without incurring risk of serious losses. We must be content to wait the development of events in other quarters, for the Boers are all round us now, and, blink the fact as we may, it must be admitted that Ladysmith is under siege.

While General French was making his reconnaissance our naval 12-pounders opened fire on "Long Tom" a few minutes after six o'clock, as a flash and puff of white smoke from his muzzle told that the bombardment was about to begin. For an hour and a half the artillery duel went on briskly, Captain Lambton's naval battery answering shot for shot, or rather anticipating each, as the shells from our guns travel with greater velocity, and get home three seconds before "Long Tom's" can take effect.

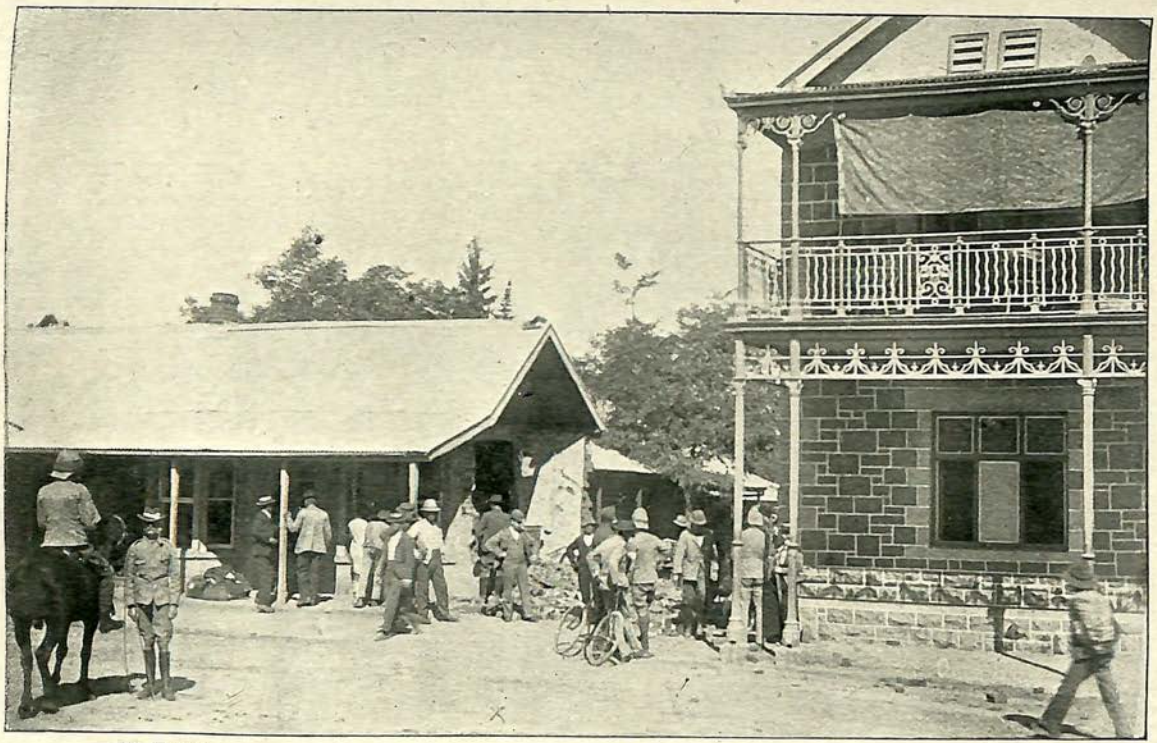
Unfortunately one of the enemy's shells fell close to Lieutenant Egerton, instructor in gunnery of H.M.S. *Powerful*, who was mortally wounded. "My cricketing days are over now," he said, with a plucky attempt to make light of his agony as the bluejackets lifted him gently on to a stretcher. The Naval Brigade also had one bluejacket wounded, but not seriously. There was only one other casualty, though shells fell frequently into the camps of Gordon Highlanders and Imperial Light Horse in rear of our main battery, the former having one man hit by a splinter as he lay in his tent. The two regiments were thereupon ordered to shift their quarters, which they did with great promptitude, having no particular fancy to play the part of targets for ninety-four-pound shells.

November 3.—Misfortunes press upon each other quickly. This morning Lieut. Egerton, R.N., a young sailor, not less distinguished for skill in his profession than for personal gallantry, died. His

requiem rang out from the naval battery in its duel with the enemy's heaviest artillery. Soon other Boer guns joined in from Lombard's Kop and the slopes of Bulwaan, throwing shells about the town as if resolved to compass its ruin.

To-day, indeed, for the first time, we have had brought home to us the dangers and discomforts, if not the horrors, of what a bombardment may be in an unfortified town under the fire of modern artillery. We cannot accuse the Boers of having deliberately thrown shells into the houses of peaceful inhabitants, or over buildings on which the Geneva Cross was flying. These are, unfortunately, just in the line of "Long Tom's" fire from Rietfontein Hill, and the shells may have been aimed at our naval battery, but, if so, they went very high, or their trajectory at that range would not have carried them half a mile beyond the mark.

Several fell near the hospital, others went 500 yards farther in the direction of Sir George White's headquarters, and one came crashing into my bedroom at the Royal Hotel, not ten yards from where many officers were then lunching. The hotel is a prominent building, that can be seen from "Long Tom's" battery, and many people, giving Boer gunners credit for astonishing accuracy, suggested that the shot must have been aimed to strike where it did, in the hope of bagging Colonel Frank Rhodes and Doctor Jameson, whose ordinary hour for meals was known to every spy frequenting the place, and



Mr. Pearse

THE ROYAL HOTEL, LADYSMITH

Face p. 26

Showing ruins of Mr. Pearse's bedroom, wrecked by a shell from "Long Tom," Nov. 3, 1899

might easily have been communicated by them to the artillerist Mattey, who was recognised among a group drinking at the bar on Tuesday evening. Of slight materials do the Ladysmith townsmen weave romances, but one can hardly be surprised, seeing how long they have lived in strained relations with neighbours whose Boer sympathies were well known. But whether intended for the Royal Hotel or not, the shell came very near to causing several vacancies in the senior ranks of this force. Passing through the ceiling and partition wall of a colleague's bedroom, it burst in mine with such force that it blew out the whole end-wall, hurling bricks across a narrow court, all about the dining-room windows, which were smashed by the explosion; but of those sitting close inside only one was slightly scratched by broken glass. Clouds of dust, mingled with fumes of powder, poured in through the open casement, so that those in farther corners were for some moments in much anxiety as to the fate of their friends. When they found that no harm had been done there was an assumption of mirth all round, but nobody cared to stay much longer in that room.

At the moment of explosion I had risen from the table to resume work in my chamber, which presented to my astonished eyes anything but the characteristics of a quiet study then. Papers scattered in every direction were buried with clothes and kit under a wreckage of building materials. One fragment of iron shell had gone clean through

a bag and all its contents to bury itself beneath the floor in earth. Another had crushed my precious Kodak flat, and there was scarcely a thing exposed in the place that had not been torn by the blast of powder or cut by splinters. The diminished population of Ladysmith began to gather about that spot when they found that no other shells fell there. "What a lucky escape for you!" they all said, and I devoutly agreed with them.

That was "Long Tom's" last attempt at bombarding Ladysmith to-day. He had been frequently silenced, and once apparently disabled in his heavy duel with "Lady Anne," as Captain Lambton names the naval quick-firing gun, and a final lucky shot either put him out of action for the day or injured so many Boer gunners that their comrades did not care to "face the music" again. While all this bombardment was going on, the telegraph staff and post-office clerks, having no work to do, amused themselves by playing cricket on the raceground within sight of the Boers on Bulwaan, and well within range of guns mounted near the crest of that hill, whence a hot fire was for some time directed towards the town. And they played their match to a finish, though one shell burst very close to them.

Meanwhile General Brocklehurst having succeeded General French in the cavalry command, took out another flying column composed of 5th Dragoon Guards, Imperial Light Horse, Border Mounted

Rifles, and one field battery, to keep the enemy in play and prevent them from mounting other guns. He attacked the ridges about Lancer's Nek and all his troops behaved brilliantly. The Border Mounted Rifles in squadrons, wave behind wave, charged a kopje as if they meant to ride full tilt to its crest, but halting at its base to dismount they scaled its rugged slopes and drove the Boers back to another ridge, exchanging shots at short range with effect on both sides. The Imperial Light Horse had meanwhile got into a tight place, and the 5th Dragoon Guards, dashing forward to their assistance were badly galled by fire from Boers concealed among rocks in front and flank. Out of this difficulty they had to run the gauntlet for their lives, but not so hurriedly that they could not stop to help comrades in distress, and many deeds of heroism under fire made the spectators of this episode forget that some one had blundered. The Boers got no more guns into position to-day, but we had only gained a brief respite, and at the sacrifice of some valuable lives. Major Taunton of the Border Mounted Rifles and Captain Knapp and Lieutenant Brabant of the Imperial Light House were killed, and many of lower rank wounded.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY DAYS OF THE SIEGE

Moral effects of shell-fire—General White appeals to Joubert—The neutral camp—Attitude of civilians—Meeting at the Town Hall—A veteran's protest—Faith in the Union Jack—An impressive scene—Removal of sick and wounded—Through the Boer lines—How the posts were manned—Enemy mounting big guns—More about the spies—Boer war ethics—In an English garden—Throwing up defences—A gentlemanly monster—The Troglodytes—Humorous and pathetic—"Long Tom" and "Lady Anne"—Links in the chain of fire—A round game of ordnance.

THE reconnaissance under General Brocklehurst, above described, brought home to the garrison of Ladysmith their utter helplessness to prevent the isolation and investment of the town. Any doubt that may have lingered among them or the civil inhabitants was dispelled by the action promptly taken by Sir George White to try and secure the safety of these latter and his sick and wounded. The circumstances are related by Mr. Pearse in a letter dated 5th November:—

SUNDAY, 5*th November*.—There can be no doubt about the first effects of shell-fire on a beleaguered town. Let men try to disguise the fact as they may, it gets on the nerves of the most courageous among us, producing a sense of helplessness in the presence of

danger. Nobody likes sitting still to be battered at without power of effective reply. Still less would he be content to stand inactive by while the wounded and defenceless were being shelled. These considerations no doubt influenced Sir George White yesterday when he sent a message to General Joubert asking that non-combatants with sick and wounded might be allowed to leave Ladysmith without molestation. It must have been bitterly humiliating for a soldier in command of ten or twelve thousand British troops, who have been twice victorious in battle, to feel that one reverse had resulted in making him a suitor for so much favour at the hands of an adversary. Whether the request ought ever to have been made or not, to say nothing of whether we ought to have been in the abject position of having to make it, is a question about which most civilians are at variance with the military authorities, seeing that the answer was a foregone conclusion. Its exact purport we do not know yet, but it amounted to a flat refusal, as most of us had foreseen, and was accompanied by alternative proposals which placed Joubert in the position of a potential conqueror—dictating terms, and our acceptance of these cannot be read by the Boers in any other light than as an admission of weakness or pusillanimity. Of course we know that it means nothing of the kind, but simply that Sir George White would not expose sick and wounded, with helpless women, children, and non-combatants

generally, to the possible horrors of a prolonged bombardment. So long as they remained in town he would be fighting with one hand tied, because he could not in that case place batteries in certain advantageous positions without the risk of drawing fire from Boer guns on Ladysmith and its civilian inhabitants. Whether this state of things has been mended much by Sir George White's acceptance of Boer conditions and Ladysmith's practical repudiation of them may well be doubted. As the matter is generally understood, General Joubert, while declining to grant Sir George's request, consented that a neutral camp for sick, wounded, and non-combatants should be formed at Intombi Spruit, five miles out on the railway line to Colenso, and practically within the Boer lines. They were to be supplied with food, water, and all necessaries from Ladysmith by train daily, under the white flag, and to be on parole not to take any part thenceforth in this war.

As a set-off against these conditions, Joubert undertook that the camp should not be fired upon by any of his men, or its occupants molested, so long as they observed the regulations imposed upon them. And he promised further that they should all be released, but still on parole, whenever the siege of Ladysmith might be raised or the Boer forces withdrawn. He gave no pledge, however, that his batteries should not be placed in such a position that they would be screened by the hospital camp from the fire of our

— Cæsar's Camp, Manchester Regt.
— Distant Flat Top Hill, Boers.
— Field Battery 42nd. 2 guns.
— Camps of Carbineers Light Horse Gordons and Artillery extending from River up valley to *
— Main Body Manchester Regt. Bomb-Proofs
— Naval Twelve Pounder.
— Camps of Gordons & Artillery near Bridge.
— Head Quarters.
— 2 Howitzers commanded by Captain Christie.
— 2nd. King's Royal Rifles.
— Waggon Hill. Mounted Infantry
— Gordon Highlanders Out Posts.
— 'Middle Hill' 6in. Creuzot, Silenced by our Howitzers Dec. 4. 99, Removed to another position.

THE BRITISH POSITION AT LADYSMITH, LOOKING NEARLY DUE SOUTH *Face p.* 128

guns, or that when he might choose to attack, the Boer forces would not advance from a point where we could not shoot at them without danger of sending shells and bullets among our own comrades and fellow-subjects.

Ladysmith's most representative men were dead against the acceptance of conditions which seemed to them all in favour of one side. They expressed freely, and without reserve, doubts as to General Joubert's good faith, and saw in his proposals only fresh instances of Boer cunning. Their sturdy manhood rebelled against arbitrary terms dictated by an enemy whose superiority, except in mere numbers, they naturally enough declined to admit. The weaker spirits might yield, if they would, out of timid respect for "Long Tom" and other heavy artillery, the shells from which, though they have done little harm so far, have a distinctly demoralising effect when they come screeching through the air and crashing into houses day after day.

In earlier stages of the bombardment people showed little alarm after they had got over the first shock of hearing a shell burst. Children were allowed to play about the streets, and women went shopping, according to the custom of their sex all the world over. Kaffir girls stood in groups at street corners, swaying their bodies as they beat noiseless time with their bare feet to the monotonous drone of mouth-organs or Jews'-harps, which most of them carry strung about their necks, wherewith to banish dull

care in the many moments of leisure snatched from toil, and beaming broad smiles on every dusky swain who passed. But the rumour got about that General Joubert had threatened to bombard the town indiscriminately if our guns fired lyddite at his batteries, and this threat had unknown terrors for the simple, who did not realise that, whether discriminately or indiscriminately, Boer shells would continue to fall in Ladysmith streets all the same.

So far as I can find out, General Joubert never sent such a foolish message, but the rumour—possibly put about by Boer agents—served its purpose by inducing a timorousness in some minds, and men who had no fear for themselves began to get very anxious about the safety of wives and children. That was the keynote of a speech made by Mr. Farquhar at the public meeting yesterday, when he, as Mayor of Ladysmith, made official announcement of General Joubert's proposals. Mr. Farquhar is a cautious Scotsman, whose sense of responsibility in such a crisis would compel him to put the gravest phase of the case first. The Boer conditions, however, met with nothing but indignant protests, nobody venturing to raise his voice in favour of them except by way of comment on the utterances of some fiery orator, who was for asking the General to send back threats of dire punishment on every Boer if a shot should be fired into the town. Mr. Charles Jones, who was a transport rider in the Boer war of 1881,

and carried Sir Evelyn Wood's despatches through the enemy's lines to a beleaguered garrison, was first to express in calm, manly words what was afterwards found to be the general feeling of the townsmen present at that meeting. Mr. Jones has won the respect of every Englishman who knows him by the steadfastness with which he stuck to his post when others were seeking safety in migration to Maritzburg or Durban. With firm faith in the leader under whom, as a volunteer, he saw active service, Mr. Jones believes that we should see our difficulties through, without asking or accepting doubtful favours from a foe. Somebody in the crowd ventured to say, "But your wife and children are not here now." "No," was the answer; "and I have no wish nor right to speak for fathers and husbands, who are at liberty to do as they please. But I can still say that if my wife and children were here, I would rather they should trust to protection under the Union Jack with British soldiers than under the white flag at Joubert's mercy."

There were men in that crowd who had to speak for those near and dear to them. Anxious-eyed and pale, with muscles knit into hard lines on their faces, one after another declared in voices that may have faltered, but still rang true as steel, that they and theirs would face their fate under the Union Jack. Archdeacon Barker, who has been ceaseless in his ministrations among the afflicted since fighting began, gave eloquent expression to the prevalent

sentiment, as one who had kith and kin about him, and finished by saying that he would neither go to the camp selected by General Joubert, nor allow his wife and family to go. To this conclusion the meeting also came by general agreement, the dissentient minority being still free to do as they wished, except that no man who had taken up arms in defence of Ladysmith could accept the terms offered by General Joubert. Then the people gave three lusty cheers, and ended by singing "God Save the Queen," with an effect, the impressiveness of which was deepened by the thought that within a few hours Ladysmith would be under bombardment from all the thundering artillery our enemy could muster. But the resolution of this public meeting made no difference to Sir George White's decision, which was a practical acceptance of the terms formulated.

To-day has passed in peace, but marked by a very natural depression as we have seen train after train laden with sick, wounded, and non-combatants, go out to the neutral camp at Intombi Spruit, where these people will have to remain under a white flag so long as this humiliating investment of Ladysmith may last. To make the matter worse they were sent out at first with insufficient supplies for urgent needs, and with so few attendants that tents for all could not be pitched the same night. Even now many non-combatants have to lie in small patrol tents of thin canvas with a double slope, under the

ridge of which there is barely room for a child to stand upright, and the camp is placed on ground so flat, near the river bank, that heavy rains might convert it into a mere swamp. There, however, General Joubert decided that the neutral camp must be pitched, and those who were too weak or spiritless to help themselves, must needs be thankful for such gracious concessions. Some, not quite satisfied with the protection this affords, are digging burrows deep into clay banks by the river side, where they will be even more liable to be flooded out. In strict justice it must be said that many sick and wounded went out, not of their own free will, but because, being under medical care, they had no option. The result of this is that men suffering from slight ailments, or whose wounds would not incapacitate them from duty longer than a week or so, are virtually prisoners of war, only to be released at the pleasure of the Boers, or until we reclaim them by force of arms. These are unpleasant things to write, but they are true none the less.

The Boer guns have preserved all along an absolute silence, which was not broken on our side until ten at night, when a sentry set off his rifle. This roused the whole camp, and soldiers everywhere stood to their arms until the cause of this false alarm was discovered.

November 6. — At daybreak this morning, Second Lieutenant Hopper, 5th Lancers, came into camp, having got through the Boer lines by a ruse

as clever as it was sportsmanlike. He brought despatches from the General commanding at Estcourt. His difficulties show that though a soldier may get through the Boer lines, they are now tightening round us, and unless a British force strong enough to break through can be assembled quickly, we are in for a long siege here. Nobody gave the Boers credit for so much enterprise, and if Sir George White made a mistake, as I think he did, in not sending all the women and children away from Ladysmith when Dundee was abandoned, this error probably arose from faulty information, for which those who thought they knew the Boers and their resources were in the first instance responsible.

Our defences begin to take shape, so that their strong and weak points can be estimated. Southward is a long brown hog-backed hill, which the local people call Bester's Ridge, though military authorities divide it into Cæsar's Camp, with Maiden's Castle forming a spur in the inner curve towards Ladysmith, and Waggon Hill. Altogether it is three miles in length, and being the key of the position will want holding. For that purpose the trusty Manchester battalion is placed there, having roughly constructed sangars for rallying points. This ridge forms one horn of the roughly-shaped horse-shoe which I have already spoken of, the toe of which sweeps round from Maiden's Castle in low but rugged kopjes overlooking slopes of open veldt to where Klip River

loops the old camp which, being constructed of corrugated iron, is called "Tin Town." That would be a weak point, but that it is protected by an outlying kopje known as Rifleman's Post on the far side of the river. This is occupied by a small body of the King's Royal Rifles, the other companies of which hold King's Post, an eminence from which the northern horn of the horse-shoe bends along by Cove Ridge, Junction Hill, Tunnel Hill, and Cemetery Hill, to Helpmakaar Hill. Here the Devons are posted at the heel of the shoe, which juts into a scrubby flat pointing towards the neck between Lombard's Kop and Bulwaan. These hills are respectively four and five miles distant from our outworks. Bulwaan stands across the opening afar off like a huge, bevelled, flat-topped bar placed, as it might be, for a horse-shoe magnet to attract it. The whole curve of our defensive works must stretch nearly nine miles. In addition, there is an undefended opening nearly two miles long, where the straggling town lies naked to its enemies, or rather screened by nothing more formidable than belts of mimosa, Australian willow, and eucalyptus trees. Between the town and Bulwaan, however, flows Klip River, with many windings through a broad plain, mostly pasturage, but with mimosa scrub closing it in towards the gorge where river and railway converge at Intombi Spruit.

Long as our defensive line is for 10 or 12,000 men to occupy effectively, it must be held at all

costs, and a post must be kept on Observation Hill north-west of the Cove Ridge, for if once the Boers got possession of that kopje they might make other positions untenable. As matters stand, they have planted guns on an outer ring of hills, whence they can throw shells into the town. Sir George White was blamed for giving up Lombard's Kop and Bulwaan, but these could not have been held without weakening more important points. They seemed, moreover, too far off to serve as artillery positions for the enemy's smaller guns, and almost inaccessible for big Creusot 94-pounders. Against attacks by riflemen from that direction the hard plain is a sufficient obstacle. Any body of Boers attempting to cross that open could be met by overwhelming infantry fire and the shrapnel of field-batteries. The idea that Bulwaan is beyond effective range of anything but the heaviest artillery has, however, been dispelled to-day. The enemy got a high velocity 40-pounder into position there, and its shell, travelling faster than sound, whistles over the town, to burst near the balloon detachment which is moving with the guy ropes up a valley towards the outer defences. This gun must have a range of nearly six miles, and we have nothing that can reach it but our naval 4.7-inch and 12-pounders mounted on Junction Hill, both of which have enough to do in keeping down the fire of "Long Tom" of Pepworth's Hill.

November 8.—In previous letters and telegrams

I have referred frequently to the presence of known Boer sympathisers who were suspected of being in constant communication with our enemies. No steps were taken to test the truth of these suspicions until numberless facts, which the most sceptical could not ignore, proved that every movement made by our troops within or near the camp was known very soon afterwards to Boers outside, who could not have discovered these things by mere observation without the aid of secret agents. Several people were understood to be shadowed, but nothing came of this except an order that no person should be allowed to remain in Ladysmith without an official permit. This was practically set at naught by farmers, who considered themselves free to enter and leave the town without let or hindrance, until it was practically surrounded by Boers, and they often gathered about the hotel doors listening furtively to every scrap of gossip or news that fell from officers.

At length the course was taken that might have saved much trouble if put into practice days earlier, by making peremptory the order that all non-residents who could not show the necessary permit to remain should clear out within twenty-four hours, or be subject to arrest and imprisonment. At the same time a warning went round that none would, after the allotted time, be allowed to pass our outposts coming or going, and so perforce many who would have been glad to get away remained, having

missed their last chance of going southwards by train. What has become of them since then I do not know, unless they have taken refuge with non-combatants, and sick and wounded, in the neutral camp. At any rate, they are not here now, and that is something to be thankful for, though they could give little information to the enemy, except that shelling has done surprisingly little harm, and killed or wounded very few in proportion to the enormous number of projectiles thrown. This in spite of good guns, aimed with most accurate skill, is attributable solely to the fact that the shells were too weakly charged to burst with much destructive effect.

But the spies—for they were certainly nothing less—had done their work in locating every point of military importance or personal interest in Ladysmith, and it is hardly possible to doubt that this knowledge was imparted to Boer gunners, who promptly began training their heaviest artillery in the direction of supply depots, ordnance stores, headquarters, intelligence offices, and other places not visible from the enemy's positions, though within easy range of, and therefore commanded by them, if the gunners knew exactly where to aim so that projectiles might drop over intervening houses and trees. When the most destructive shell burst in my bedroom most people regarded it as an accidentally erratic shot, intended for some other mark. Those who suggested that time and place had been de-

liberately chosen because Colonel Frank Rhodes, Doctor Jameson, Sir John Willoughby, General French with his staff, and other officers, were known to have lunched in the Royal Hotel on several previous days, met with nothing but ridicule. Colonel Rhodes especially made light of the idea that any gun could shoot so accurately as to get within a few feet of hitting the exact mark aimed at from a range of nearly five miles. Since then, however, the hotel has been nearly struck several times, and on each occasion about the same hour, so that the most sceptical are now changing their opinions in favour of a belief that the Royal Hotel has been marked for destruction. Out of consideration for other guests, therefore, Colonel Rhodes, "the Doctor," Sir John Willoughby, and Lord Ava have taken up their quarters elsewhere.

It may be a mere coincidence, but since their departure shells have fallen less frequently in this part of the town, though a great many have passed close over the Town Hall, on which a Red Cross flag floats, denoting its use as a refuge for sick and wounded, and the Convent Hospital, conspicuously placed on a ridge behind, has been completely wrecked inside. Fortunately, however, the convalescent patients and nurses were got away before that happened. It will probably be pleaded in justification of the Boers that these buildings, being directly in the line of fire behind our naval batteries, were liable to be hit by high shots from "Long

Tom." The same excuse, however, cannot be made in other cases when shells fell among houses that are not in line with any defensive work, camp, or arsenal. One cannot suppose that a mere desire for wanton destruction of life and property directed the shots, which were probably aimed on the off-chance of hitting officers known or believed to be living in those houses. That would be sufficient justification according to all the accepted ethics of war, and some military men contend even that the Boers would be quite right to shell Ladysmith until it was reduced to ruins if they hoped to accelerate thereby the work they have taken in hand. It must be remembered that Joubert's main object just now is to gain possession of the town, which it is said he has sworn to capture, and if he thought that end could be hastened by ceaseless bombardment of the place, involving possible slaughter of many unarmed people, there is nothing in the law of nations to prevent him, so long as a military force remains here ostensibly for the defence of Ladysmith.

So runs the argument, but it would be preposterous to assume that General Joubert thinks he can reduce British troops to submission or bring about an evacuation by such feeble means. Sir George White has, from humane motives, yielded points to his adversary which most of us would have thought worth fighting for, but he is every inch a gallant soldier, as we who have watched him under heavy fire all know

full well, and nobody here needs to be assured that he will never surrender Ladysmith or abandon its stubborn defence as long as there is any reason for holding it.

Ample provision is made for the safety of all non-combatants, where they will not be exposed to shell fire from any quarter, or other dangers except unlikely accidents, and against these no foresight can guard entirely. There are some people who continue to take all risks rather than forsake their property by day or night. These, however, are comparatively few. The great majority got away while there was yet time, leaving their houses, full of furniture, locked up or in charge of Kaffir servants. Curiously enough, they were in many cases the first to suffer loss by shell fire, and are probably now congratulating themselves on the timely desertion that enabled them to escape worse evils.

Mr. Fortescue Carter, the most famous of Ladysmith's townsmen, whose *History of the Boer War in 1881* is well known, had scarcely left his home, next door to the Intelligence Department's headquarters, when shells began to fall in his beautiful garden among rose trees, hollyhocks, dahlias, verbenas, and other familiar English flowers, which he cultivated with much care. Neighbours might be content to surround their houses with fences of almond-scented oleander, and let the hundred varieties of South African shrubs bloom in

wild profusion under the shadowing eucalyptus tree, but his gardens were laid out with well-ordered primness, and in them he delighted to see growing the fragrant flowers that reminded him and his visitors of home life in England. All this is in danger of becoming a shell-fretted wilderness now. "Long Tom" once having turned his attention in this direction continued to pound away until two shots struck the house itself, and, bursting inside, shattered the dainty contents of several rooms to atoms.

Meanwhile, in a picturesque, vine-trellised cottage, not fifty yards off, ladies went about their domestic duties as usual, apparently oblivious of all danger. One I saw quietly knitting in the cool, shaded stoep, and her busy needles only stopped for one moment, when a shell burst in the roadway beyond, then went on again as nimbly as ever. After the first shock, some people, who seem least fitted to bear a continuous strain on their nerves, become so accustomed to the hurtling of huge projectiles through the air that they show no sign of fear when danger is close to them. Women are often braver than men in these circumstances. There is one whose courageous example alone keeps native servants and coolie waiters at their posts, but she, when little more than a child, saw some of the horrors of the Zulu War, and she speaks with pride of her father as one of the few farmers who, refusing to quit their homes, kept wives and families about

them, and fought like heroes in defence of all they held dear.

Not all in Ladysmith are of this heroic temper, but very few make open parade of fear if they have any, and though precautions are taken against exposure to unnecessary risks, there is no sign of panic yet. Soldiers, every one of whom may be very valuable as a fighting unit before this siege closes, are ordered to protect themselves by such shelter trenches or bomb-proofs as can be constructed out of loose stones, sandbags, forage bales, or other material that lies ready at hand. The works have to be built under shell-fire, but when finished they will be an inestimable advantage to regiments that occupy day and night hill-crests where they might be enfiladed by long-range artillery fire. That risk must, of course, be taken if the enemy's riflemen should harden their hearts for a determined frontal attack upon any position supported by flank fire from guns, but until such a critical moment arrives the men not actually on duty as sentries or outlying pickets will be little harassed by bursting shells or flying splinters or showers of shrapnel bullets, if they dig themselves good pits to lie in, with sufficiently thick coverings overhead.

The 1st Devon battalion, which, as one of the best here, and trusted for its steadiness in all circumstances, was given the most vulnerable point to hold, has busied itself in the formation of works that promise to make Helpmakaar Hill impregnable, though

its long, low spur is exposed to artillery fire from Bulwaan and Lombard's Kop and the scrub-screened nek between them. The works there show what can be done under difficulties by a good regiment toiling cheerfully to carry out the orders of good officers. The original breastworks were traced by engineers who had in view rather the necessity of throwing up light defences against rifle fire than the probability that these works would be battered at by heavy artillery from one side and taken in reverse from another. It soon became evident that the entrenchments if left in that state would be untenable, and yet they could not be abandoned without serious risk that Boers might then be able to advance under cover near enough to threaten other posts, if not to command by rifle fire, within twelve hundred yards or so, the heights on which naval guns are mounted. Only by holding the contours of extreme spurs on Helpmakaar Hill could the Devons hope to sweep by rifle fire a wide zone of slightly undulating veldt, and thus command all possible approaches from Lombard's Kop or Bulwaan in that direction. So they stuck generally to the lines traced by engineers for their outer defences, but deepened the trenches, widened the banks in front of them, built bomb-proof traversers overlaid with balks and earth to neutralise the effects of enfilading fire, and then began to form for themselves dug-out huts in which to sleep, with solid earth roofs supported on railway sleepers.

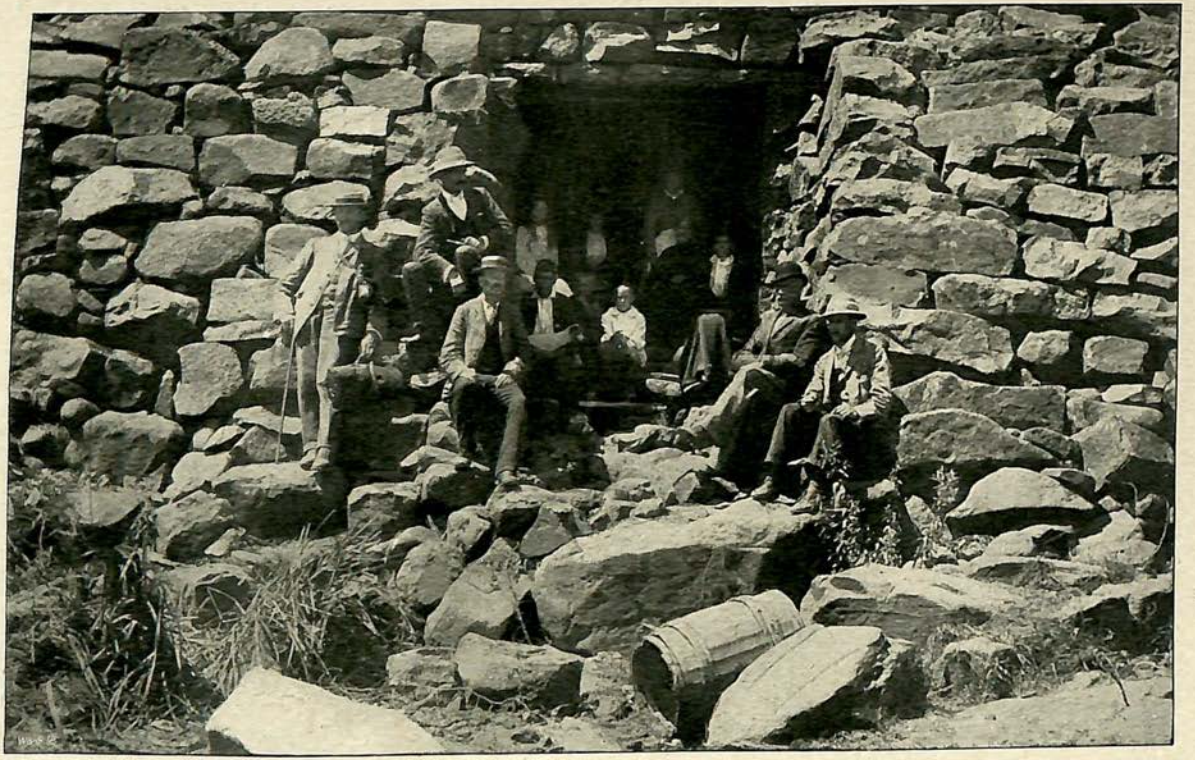
All this means enormous labour, carried on frequently under a galling cannonade from the enemy's smaller guns, and interrupted occasionally by the necessity of having to keep down the rifle-fire that comes from a distant kopje, while standing on the front of these works.

Yesterday, watching a cavalry patrol that tried in vain to feel for a way through the scrubby nek into more open ground beyond, General Brocklehurst and his staff were nearly hit by a shell from some newly-mounted battery the exact position of which could not be located, for its smokeless powder made no flash that anybody could see in broad daylight, nor generated even the faintest wreath of vapour. Its projectile travelled faster than sound, so that the range could not have been great, but there was nothing by which our own batteries might have been directed to effective reply. We all abused "Long Tom" at first because of his unprovoked attack on a defenceless town, but by contrast with what is known among Devon men as the "Bulwaan Sneak," and among bluejackets as "Silent Susan," the big Creusot gun with its loud report, the low velocity of its projectiles, and the puff of white smoke giving timely warning when a shot is on its way, is regarded as quite a gentlemanly monster.

Following the example thus set by regiments on the main defensive positions, others temporarily in reserve have begun to build or dig for themselves splinter- or bomb-proof retreats, in which they may

take shelter when the shelling becomes too hot. The Imperial Light Horse were first to hit upon the idea of burrowing into the river-banks. They began by forming mere niches, in which there was only just room enough for three or four men to stand huddled together when they heard a shell coming. Finding, however, that the soil could be easily dug out, they set gangs of natives to work lengthening the tunnels and connecting them by "cross drives," in the planning of which several Johannesburg mine managers found congenial occupation. This went on until the river-bank for a hundred yards in length was honeycombed by dark caves, in which a whole regiment might have been hidden with all its ammunition, secure from shell fire, the walls and roofs being so formed that they needed no additional support. There was no danger of the stiff alluvial soil falling in even if a shell had buried itself and burst above the entrance to any of these cool grottoes.

I spent half an hour in one of them, and found the air there delightful by contrast with scorching sunshine outside. What it will be, however, after many people have been crowded together for some time is less pleasant to contemplate, but even for that the resourceful Imperial Light Horse are prepared, and they already begin to talk of air-shafts so cunningly contrived that light and air may enter, but shells be rigidly excluded. Civilians in their turn emulate the Light Horse, but with unequal



A SHELL-PROOF RESORT

Face p. 50

A culvert under a road used as a living-place by day for civilians, who returned to their houses when the shelling ceased after sunset

success, and their excavations assume such primitive forms that future archæologists may be puzzled to invent satisfactory explanations of curious differences in the habits of the cave-dwellers of Ladysmith, as exemplified by the divergent types of their underground abodes.

And, indeed, these habits are strangely various even as presented to the eyes of a contemporary student. Some people, having spent much time and patient labour in making burrows for themselves, find life there so intolerably monotonous that they prefer to take the chances above ground. Others pass whole days with wives and families or in solitary misery where there is not light enough to read or work, scarcely showing a head outside from sunrise to sunset. They may be seen trooping away from fragile tin-roofed houses half an hour before daybreak carrying children in their arms, or a cat, or monkey, or a mongoose, or a cage of pet birds, and they come back similarly laden when the night gets too dim for gunners to go on shooting. There would be a touch of humour in all this if it were not so deeply pathetic in its close association with possible tragedies. One never knows where or at what hour a stray shot or splinter will fall, and it is pitiful sometimes to hear cries for dolly from a prattling mite who may herself be fatherless or motherless to-morrow. We think as little as possible of such things, putting them from us with the light comment that they happen daily elsewhere

than in besieged towns, and making the best we can of a melancholy situation.

There are, I believe, many good reasons why Sir George White should allow his army to be hemmed in here defending a practically deserted town, apart from the ignominy that abandonment would entail, and it is probably sound strategy to keep Boer forces here as long as possible while preparations are being matured for attacking them from other directions. On the latter point one cannot express an opinion without full knowlege of the circumstances such as we cannot hope to get while communications are cut off. But nobody can pretend to regard our present inaction following investment as anything but a disagreeable necessity, or affect a cheerful endurance of conditions that become more intolerable day after day. Now and then we have hopes that the Boers may risk everything in a general attack with the object of carrying this place by storm, when they would most certainly be beaten off and lose heavily.

They did something to encourage this hope yesterday. It began with a heavy artillery duel between "Long Tom" and the naval gun that is known as "Lady Anne." After vain attempts to silence our battery, the enemy's fire, generally so accurate, became wild, several shells going so high that they struck the convent hospital hundreds of yards in rear. This, at any rate, is the most charitable explanation of acts that would otherwise be inexcusable.

The Red Cross was at that time, and for days before, flying above the convent, in which Colonel Dick-Cunyngham and Major Riddell were patients, under the care of nursing sisters. Fortunately, good shelter was found for them in the convent cellars until they could be removed to safer quarters, but before this much of the upper rooms had been reduced to ruins by persistent shelling. When the Boers thought they had sufficiently demoralised our defensive forces by artillery "preparation," a brisk attack by riflemen began to develop against Maiden's Castle, Cæsar's Camp, and Waggon Hill, a continuous range forming the southern key to our position, and held by the Manchester Regiment. Brigadier-General Hamilton and his staff were there from the outset, ready, if need be, to call up the Gordons in support. This necessity, however, never arose, though the attack, as I can testify from personal observation on the spot, was pushed for some time with great persistence, the Boers trying again and again to creep up by the western slopes of Waggon Hill, while shells raked the whole face of Cæsar's Camp to Maiden's Castle, and burst repeatedly among the tents of the Manchester battalion, without doing serious harm.

A colour-sergeant with only fourteen men defended the crest of Waggon Hill until nightfall, when the Boers retired sullenly. To repeated offers of reinforcements the sergeant warmly replied that he had men enough for the job, and proved it by repelling

every attack, the Boers declining to face the steady fire that was poured upon them whenever they showed themselves. Colonel Hamilton, however, had a firm conviction that the Boer movement against that flank was only a feeler for more determined enterprises to follow, and he accordingly stiffened the defensive lines there by mounting half a field battery in strong earthworks during the night, and sending up bodies of mounted infantry to support the Manchesters.

As the sun was setting in clouded splendour behind Mount Tinwa's noble crags and peaks, throwing their dark shadows across the lower hills near us, a flash so quick, that it could hardly be seen, darted from out the gloom there, and with the crashing report that followed came a shell plump into one of our most crowded camps. This was evidently from a gun newly mounted on Blaauwbank. Two other shells burst in quick succession about the same place, but fortunately nobody was hit. Then, satisfied with having got the range to a nicety, our enemy left us in undisturbed quiet for the night, but with an uncomfortable consciousness that fresh links were being forged in the chain of artillery fire by which Ladysmith is now completely girdled, for two batteries that cannot be exactly located have been shelling steadily all day from each end of Bulwaan, with accurate aim and far-reaching effect, as if to disprove all the theories that led to the error of abandoning that position.

This morning fallacious prophecies were further shattered by a shell from works placed far back on the table top of Bulwaan. It did not demolish anything else, but it makes us very chary now about predicting what the Boers can or cannot do. Through telescopes they had been watched building that strong fort, and everybody knew it was being thrown up as an emplacement for heavy artillery, yet few people thought that another gun, akin to "Long Tom" in calibre and range, could have been mounted there so soon, until they saw the dense cloud of smoke from a black powder charge, and heard the familiar gurgling screech of a big shell, followed by the thundering report.

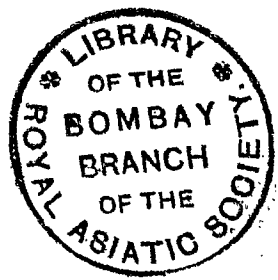
"Puffing Billy" was the appropriate name bestowed on this new enemy by Colonel Rhodes, who has an amusing faculty for applying quaintly descriptive phrases to every fresh development in this state of siege. I am told on high authority that the word "siege" is not quite applicable to our case here, but if the Boers are not sitting down before Ladysmith in a very leisurely way, intent upon keeping us under bombardment as long as they may choose to stay, I do not know the meaning of such movements. It was we who provoked "Puffing Billy" to his first angry roar by a trial shot from one of our big naval guns into the Bulwaan battery. "Long Tom" presently joined in the chorus, and it took our two 4.7 quick-firers all their time to keep down that cross-fire. Though "Lady Anne's" twin-

sister had been mounted some days, her voice was seldom heard, until this morning, when, after a few rounds, "Long Tom" paid silent homage to her sway, and in celebration of that temporary knock-out, Captain Lambton christened his new pet "Princess Victoria," but the bluejackets called it by another name, to indicate their faith in its destructive effect.

It was interesting to watch these weapons at work. Their gunners would wait until they saw a flash from "Long Tom" or "Puffing Billy" and then fire, their shells getting home first by two or three seconds, owing to the greater velocity imparted by cordite charges. Soon after ten o'clock the enemy's artillery fire from different directions grew brisker. The damage, whatever it may have been, inflicted on "Long Tom," or his crew, having been made good under cover of a white flag, which the Boers seem to think they are at liberty to use whenever it suits them, Rietfontein called to Bulwaan, and Blaauwbank in the west echoed the dull boom that came from the distant flat-topped hill in the east. Then along our main positions, against the Leicesters and Rifles on one side, and the Manchesters on another, an attack by rifles developed quickly.

Intermittently these skirmishes lasted most of the day, our enemy never pressing his attack home, but contenting himself with long-range shooting from good cover. Neither heavy guns nor small arms did much damage. Major Grant, R.E., of the

Intelligence Staff, was slightly wounded as he sat coolly sketching the scene of hostilities as he saw it from the front of Cæsar's Camp. A lieutenant of the Manchesters and three men of the Leicester Regiment were also hit by rifle bullets or shell splinters, but none very seriously.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CHAPTER V

THE FIRST BOER ASSAULT

Joubert's boast—The preliminaries of attack—Shells in the town—A simultaneous advance—Observation Hill threatened—A wary enemy—A prompt repulse—Attack on Tunnel Hill—The colour-sergeant's last words—Manchesters under fire—Prone behind boulders—A Royal salute—The Prince of Wales's birthday—Stretching the Geneva Convention—The redoubtable Miss Maggie—The Boer Foreign Legion—Renegade Irishmen—A signal failure.

FROM the first moment of complete investment here my belief (continues Mr. Pearse, writing on 9th November) has been that the Boers would never venture to push an infantry attack against this place to the point of a determined assault. This opinion is strengthened by to-day's events. Yet it is said that Joubert believes he could take Ladysmith by a *coup de main* at any time were it not for his fear of mines, which he believes have been secretly laid at many points round our positions. His riflemen certainly did not come close enough to test the truth of this belief to-day, but contented themselves with shooting from very safe cover at long ranges. If they could have shaken our troops at any point

they would doubtless have taken advantage of it to push forward and take up other equally sheltered positions, whence they might have practised their peculiar tactics with possibly greater effect. These methods, however, lack the boldness necessary for an assault on positions held by disciplined troops, and having no single objective they are gradually frittered away in isolated and futile skirmishes, whereby the defenders are to some extent harassed, but the defences in no way imperilled.

Our enemies began at five o'clock this morning with artillery fire from Bulwaan and Rietfontein on Pepworth's Hill. This unusual activity so early warned us that some movement of more than ordinary importance might be expected. All preparations for the possibility of an attack more determined than the feeble feelers of yesterday had been made in good time, so that there was no hurrying of forces to take up or strengthen positions that might be threatened, and the Boers were evidently somewhat puzzled where to look for the masses of men who showed no sign of movement. They thereupon took to shelling the town as if they thought our troops might be concentrating there, and under cover of this vigorous bombardment their riflemen advanced, so far as caution would permit them, against several points wide apart. It must have been with the idea of a feint that they made the first attack from westward against Observation Hill, which was held by outposts of the 5th Lancers,

dismounted and trusting to their carbine fire, the ineffectiveness of which, when opposed to Mauser rifles of greater accuracy at long range, soon became evident.

Two companies of the Rifle Brigade had, however, been moved forward to support the cavalry, and their steady shooting checked the enemy's frontal attack. Several officers and other picked shots, lying prone behind boulders, took on the Boers at their own game with perceptible effect at 1200 yards or more, thereby keeping down a fire that might otherwise have harassed our men, who were necessarily exposed at times in taking up positions to meet some change of tactics on the other side. Boers never expose themselves when they find bullets falling dangerously close to them. They will be behind a rock all day if need be, waiting for the chance of a pot-shot, and stay there until darkness gives them an opportunity to get away unseen. They give no hostages to fortune by taking any risks that can be avoided. The game of long bowls and sniping suits them best. When one place gets too hot for them to pot quickly at our men without risk of being potted in turn, they will steal away one by one, wriggling their way between boulders, creeping under cover of bushes, doing anything rather than show themselves as targets for other men's rifles.

They have made the most of physical features, that in this country lend themselves to such tactics, by occupying hills with heavy artillery, in front of

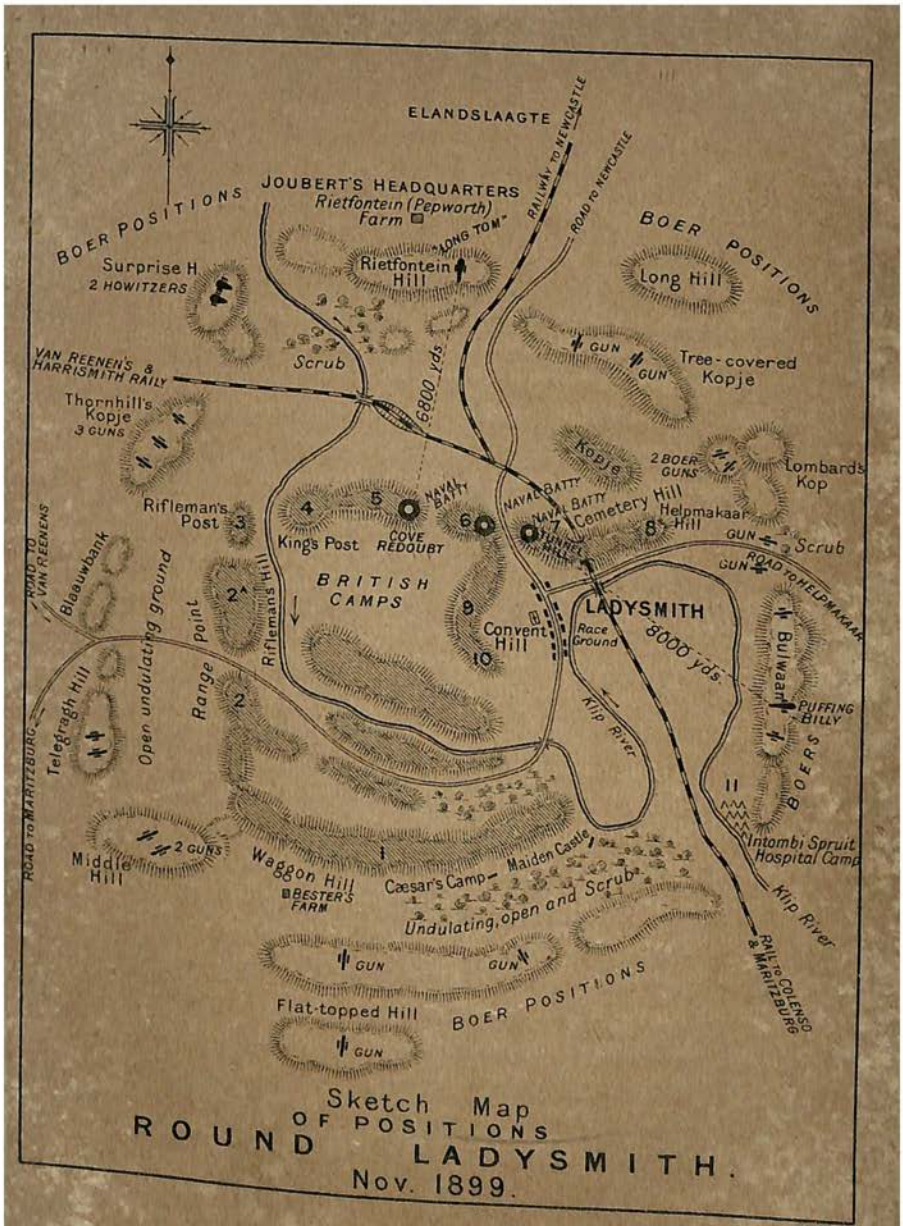
EXPLANATION TO SKETCH MAP OF POSITIONS ROUND LADYSMITH, NOVEMBER 1899

1. Maiden's Castle, Cæsar's Camp, and Waggon Hill—held by Manchester Battalion, 2nd King's Royal Rifles, and one battery; Gordons in support.
2. Range Post Ridge—held by two companies of Royal Irish Fusiliers.

2A. Rifleman's Ridge—held by King's Royal Rifles.

3. Rifleman's Post detached signal station—held by King's Royal Rifles.
4. King's Post detached signal station—held by King's Royal Rifles.
5. Cove Hill—held by Rifle Brigade; Cove redoubt; at its eastern end is a battery for one 4.7-in. naval gun.
6. Junction Hill—held by Leicesters and naval 12-pounder.
7. Tunnel Hill and Cemetery Hill—held by naval battery in redoubt, 4.7-in. gun, two companies of Gloucesters, and the Liverpool Regiment.
8. Helpmakaar Hill—held by 1st Devons, who have entrenched themselves strongly, and one battery field artillery, protected by epaulements, traverses, etc.
9. Convent Hill.
10. Headquarters.
11. Intombi Spruit, camp for sick and wounded and non-combatants, close to Boer lines.

Face Plate, p. 60



Sketch Map
OF POSITIONS
ROUND LADYSMITH.
Nov. 1899.

[Face p. 60

which are rough kopjes strewed with trap rock, and round these the Boer riflemen can always move for advance or retirement well screened from our fire. They have, however, to reckon sometimes with the far-reaching power of shrapnel shells. When they ignore that we may manage to catch them in a cluster.

So it happened to-day. After being beaten off from the direct attack on Observation Hill they began feeling round its left flank by way of kopjes, between which and our outposts there is a long bare nek, and in rear of that the railway line to Van Reenan's Pass runs through a deep cutting with open ground beyond. To effect a turning movement of any significance the Boers had choice of two things: either they must show themselves on spurs where there was scant cover, or take to the cutting; and we knew by experience which they would prefer. In anticipation of such a development one field-battery had been placed on the rough slope that juts northward from Range Post, through which runs the main road to Colenso in the south and to several of the Drakensberg passes in the west. Up through a gorge deeply fretted by Klip River this battery commanded the long bare nek. Two other guns, the Maxim-Nordenfelts of Elandslaagte, manned by a comparatively weak detachment, took up a position on their own account at the foot of King's Post near our old permanent, but now disused, camp, whence they could bring a fire to bear on the same point.

All tried a few percussion shells by way of testing the range and then turned to the use of shrapnel, which, admirably timed, burst just beyond the nek, searching its reverse slopes and enfilading the railway ravine with a hail of bullets, where apparently the Boers must have been caught in some numbers. At any rate they are said to have lost heavily there, and from that time the attack or rather fusilade directed against Observation Hill began to slacken. We had not many men hit considering that the skirmish had begun soon after daybreak and continued with little cessation up to nine o'clock, when the Rifle Brigade reported three wounded, one being young Lieutenant Lethbridge, who is so badly injured that recovery in his case can hardly be hoped for.

We had not, however, done with the enemy by repulsing him at one point. His big guns opened again presently from Blaauwbank and Rietfontein to the west and north. A smaller battery on Long Hill echoed the deep boom from "Long Tom," who was carrying on a duel with our naval gun, and throwing shells over the town, to burst very near Sir George White's headquarters. Field-guns from the nek near Lombard's Kop joined in chorus, shooting with effect on Tunnel Hill, held by the Liverpools, several of whom were hit. Colour-Sergeant Macdonald went out of the bomb-proof to mark where one shell had struck, when another burst on the same spot, and he fell terribly mangled by jagged fragments of iron. His comrades rushed to aid him, but he died

in their arms, saying simply, "What a pity it was I went out to see." In truth the shells did not want looking for to-day. They were falling in rapid succession from one end of Bulwaan on Helpmakaar Hill, where the Devons, thanks to having taken wise precautions in making bomb-proof shelters, suffered little, though "Puffing Billy" turned occasionally to hurl a 94-pounder in that direction when tired of raking Cæsar's Camp and Maiden's Castle, where the Manchesters had not only their flank exposed to this fire, but were smitten in front by a heavy gun the Boers had mounted on Flat-Top Mountain, some three miles off, and by smaller shells that came from automatic guns hidden among scrub on the nearer slopes across Bester's Farm. These did little harm, though the repeated thuds of their discharge, like the rapid strokes of a Nasmyth hammer on its anvil, might have shaken the resolution of any but the steadiest troops, seeing that our field-battery on Maiden's Castle could not for a long time locate the exact hiding-place of those vicious little weapons, and when they did get a chance, the enemy's heavy artillery replied to their fire with a more persistent cannonade than ever. The Manchesters stood manfully the test of long exposure to this galling storm of iron and lead, their fighting line continuing to hold the outer slopes, where from behind boulders they could overlook the hollow between them and their foes, and get occasionally shots at any Boer who happened to show himself incautiously. That did

not happen often, and their chances of effective reply to the bullets or shells that lashed the ground about them were few at first.

When an attack of riflemen did begin to develop with some show of being pressed home, the Manchesters were still lying there ready to meet it with a fire steadier than that of the Boers and if anything more deadly. Being secure from flanking movements, since the Border Mounted Rifles were on their right sweeping round Waggon Hill and some companies of the 60th in support, the Manchesters could devote all their attention to that long front, and beat back every attempt of the Boers to cross the valley where a tributary of the Klip River winds past Bester's Farm down to the broad flats by Intombi Spruit. These hostile demonstrations were never very determined or long sustained, and they slackened down to nothing for a time just before noon.

At that hour a curiously impressive incident astonished many of us in camp not less than it did the Boers. Guns, big and small, of our Naval Battery having shotted charges were carefully laid with the enemy's artillery for their mark, and at a given signal they began to fire slowly, with regular intervals between. When twenty-one rounds had been counted everybody knew that it was a Royal salute, in celebration of the Prince of Wales's birthday. Then loud cheers, begun as of right by the blue-jackets, representing the senior service, ran round our chains of outposts and fighting men, shaken into

light echoes by the jagged rocks, to roll in mightier chorus through the camps, thence onward by river-banks, where groups emerged from their burrows, strengthening the shouts with even more fervour, and into the town, where loyalty to the Crown of England has a meaning at this moment deeper than any of us could ever have attached to it before. "What do you make of it all?" was the signal flashed from hill to hill along the Boer lines, and interpreted by our own experts who hold the key. And well they might wonder, for in all probability a Prince of Wales's birthday has never been celebrated before with a Royal salute of shotted guns against the batteries of a besieging force, and all who are here wish most heartily that the experience may remain unique.

Our enemy's astonishment, however, had the effect of producing a temporary cessation of hostilities. The bombardment was not carried on with its previous vigour, possibly because some detachments, taken unaware by the prolonged artillery fire from our side, had been partially disabled. But the rifle attack against Maiden's Castle and Cæsar's Camp was kept up until near sunset.

In the midst of this cross-fire a flag, with the Geneva emblem of mercy on it, was hoisted at the topmost twig of a low mimosa bush in front of Bester's Farm, which must not be confounded with the other Bester's away to westward, near the Harrismith Railway, and giving its name to a station

on that line. There are many branches of the Bester family holding farms in Natal, and nearly all are under a cloud of suspicion at this moment because of their known sympathy with the Boers. That red-cross flag was taken as a sign that the farmstead had been occupied as a hospital, and we respected it accordingly, but, as on other occasions in this curiously conducted campaign, the Boers, who stretch the Geneva Convention for all it is worth in their own favour, made it cover something else. While our soldiers scrupulously avoided firing anywhere near the farmstead that bore that emblem of neutrality, they saw herds of cattle and horses being driven off, and these were followed presently by a trek waggon on which also the red-cross flag waved conspicuously.

In that waggon were several women carrying white sunshades, and among them, it is said, the redoubtable Miss Maggie who used to ride her bicycle through our lines to the enemy's, even after war had been declared and Free State burghers had crossed the border into Natal. If that is so, she and many of her relations have crossed our lines finally, to throw in their lot with the Boers, accompanied by very valuable herds of live-stock. The only Besters who remained in our hands as hostages have, I believe, been allowed to take refuge with sick and wounded at Intombi Spruit camp, where they at least are safe enough under the protection of their Boer friends. Other curious flags were seen about the

same place to-day. Lieutenant Fisher of the Manchesters, who though wounded soon after sunrise refused to quit his post, and with half a company held one shoulder of Waggon Hill until the last attack had spluttered out, sent a careful report to his colonel before the ambulance men took him to their field hospital. In this report he gives details of some curious movements among the enemy. One contingent, apparently some foreign legion, showing traces of elementary discipline and evidently not numbering in its ranks many Boers of the old school, advanced boldly across ground that afforded them little cover, and there began to "front form" in fairly good order. They were well within range of Lee-Enfield rifles, and a few volleys well directed sent them to the right-about in anything but good order. Soon after, a second column advanced with even more bravado, headed by a standard-bearer, who carried a red flag. These were said to be Irishmen, who, having elected to serve a republic, and being debarred from fighting under the green banner of their own country, yet not quite ready to acknowledge the supremacy of another race, may have flaunted the emblem of liberty by way of compromise. More probably, however, they were a mixed lot owning no common country, but willing or unwilling to serve under any colours with equal impartiality. Two or three shrapnels bursting in front of them to a vibrato accompaniment of rifle fire many were seen to fall, but whether badly hit or

not nobody on our side could say. At any rate, these adventurous auxiliaries are likely to learn discretion from the wily Boer after such an experience.

The attack, such as it was, had failed on both the positions threatened. It was never pressed home with energy at any point, and unless the Boers prove to be as good at concentration as they are in mobility, there is not the remotest chance for them to achieve even a temporary success by rifle attack against infantry whose discipline and steadiness have not been shaken in the slightest degree by shell fire yet. What losses our foes suffered we have no means of knowing, but they were probably much heavier than our own, which numbered five killed and twenty-four wounded, mostly by shells, in the twelve hours of intermittent fighting.

CHAPTER VI

A MONTH UNDER SHELL FIRE

The first siege-baby—An Irish-American deserter—A soldierly grumble—Boer cunning and Staff-College strategy—An ammunition difficulty—The tireless cavalry—A white flag incident—What the Boer Commandant understood—The Natal summer—Mere sound and fury—Boer Sabbatarianism—Naval guns at work—"Puffing Billy" of Bulwaan—Intrepid Boer gunners—The barking of "Pom-Poms"—Another reconnaissance—"Like scattered bands of Red Indians"—A futile endeavour—A night alarm—Recommended for the V.C.—A man of straw in khaki—The Boer search-light—Shelling of the hospital—General White protests—The first woman hit—General Hunter's bravado—"Long Tom" knocked out—A gymkhana under fire—Faith, Hope, and Charity—Flash signals from the south—A new Creusot gun.

THE garrison and inhabitants of Ladysmith now began to realise that they were doomed to a long period of inactivity if to nothing more serious. The days immediately following the Boer attempt of 9th November were quiet, rain and mist interfering with the enemy's bombardment. November 12 was, however, a somewhat eventful day, owing to the birth of the first siege-baby, and the arrival in camp of an Irish-American deserter from the Boers.

The baby, says Mr. Pearse in his diary (12th November), was born, not in a dug-out by the river, but at a farm on a hill in the centre of

defensive works, where Mr. and Mrs. Moore, with their other children, have elected to take the chances, near where I and other correspondents have pitched our tents. Mrs. Moore made one trial of an underground shelter, and then gave it up, saying that she should certainly die in that damp atmosphere, so that it would be better to take the risk of living where one could get fresh air, even though exposed to shells. The Irish-American's story, though not to be swallowed without salt, tended to confirm some things that seemed strange in the fight of three days earlier, when, as will be remembered, Lieutenant Fisher's detachment claimed to have shot many of a body that marched into action boldly with a red flag flaunting at their head. The deserter said that the Irish brigade that day lost heavily, having now only seventy-three left of the original three hundred and fifty, and that ten Irishmen were killed by one of our shells.

It was not with a good grace that Sir George White's garrison resigned themselves to inaction. Their state of mind is shown clearly enough by Mr. Pearse in a letter written on 14th November, and describing the situation at this period.

November 14.—The British troops here have their backs up now, and grumble at the fate that chains them to a passive defence, when they would wish for nothing better than to try conclusions with their foes at close quarters. Sir George White knows best the part that he is expected to play in

the general strategy of this campaign, and there may be reasons for not forcing the Boers to abandon any of their positions round Ladysmith until the time ripens for a decisive action. It is impossible, however, to ignore the effect that this produces on the temper of soldiers, who say with characteristic energy of expression that they would rather a hundred times take their chances with death in a fair fight than remain idle under a shell fire that is trying to the strongest nerves, though it does little material harm. Sir George is naturally reluctant to sacrifice valuable lives in capturing positions which we have not men enough to hold, but it would be something gained if we could attack one point at a time, seize the Boer gun there, and put it permanently out of action. Instead of that, we have allowed our adversary to increase the number of artillery works and rifle sangars, girding us about until his grip is so strong that even cavalry scouts cannot push five miles from camp in any direction without having to run the gauntlet of shells or Maxim bullets.

There are three positions which we might have held, or at least prevented the enemy from occupying, and thereby frustrated all attempts for at least a week longer, so that our communications southward would have remained open until ample supplies of war material of various kinds, much needed here, and especially appliances for long-distance signalling or wireless telegraphy, could be brought up. But the time for that went by while we were engaged in

preparing positions for the passive defence of Ladysmith, and the Boers, with the "slimness" that has always characterised them in such operations, slipped round our flank to cut us off from railway or telegraphic communication with lower Natal. Even the guns of H.M.S. *Powerful*, on which we rely for keeping down the enemy's long-range fire, did not get their full supply of ammunition before the line was closed, and if any signalling appliances more far-reaching than those ordinarily in use with a field force were applied for in accordance with Captain Lambton's suggestion, they never came.

As events have turned out, this was the gravest mischance of all, since the next step which our wily enemies took was to close every means of egress from this camp by placing their lighter artillery or mounted riflemen on kopjes whence all open ground over which troops might move could be swept by cross-fire. In other words, they took all the rough eminences of the outer ranges best adapted for their own tactics, and left the bare, shelterless plains or ridges to us. So far, therefore, Boer cunning has proved itself more than a match for Staff-College strategy, and nothing can restore the balance now but a strong blow struck quickly and surely from our side. Against that the Boers are naturally weak in proportion to the thinness of their investing line, which stretches round a perimeter of nearly twenty miles; but on the other hand, their greater mobility, owing to the fact that every rifleman is mounted,

gives them a surprising power of rapid concentration on any point that happens to be threatened. This is a factor that will have to be reckoned with in European warfare of the future, if I mistake not the meaning of lessons we are learning here. Nevertheless we might harass our enemies, giving them little rest day or night. Here, however, the ammunition difficulty comes in again. We have enough to last through a siege, but none to waste on doubtful enterprises. This reduces us to the contemplation of night attacks, and to trust in no weapon but the bayonet for capturing guns in positions which we have not men enough to hold.

Tommy is ready and eager to try conclusions with the enemy on these terms, if his leaders will only give him the chance, but meanwhile our movements take the form of reconnaissances that lead to no tangible advantages either in lessening the vigour of our adversary's bombardment or in loosening any links in the chain of investment by which we are bound. The situation is certainly curious and interesting historically as an event for which no exact parallel can be found in the annals of England's wars.

In writing of futile reconnaissances it is hardly necessary that I should disclaim all intention of ignoring the excellent work done by individual regiments on which the duties of patrolling have by turns fallen. Dragoon Guards, Lancers, Hussars, Imperial Light Horse, Natal Carbineers, and Border Mounted

Rifles, have known little real rest for days past. When not actually scouting the cavalry have been either on outpost within touch of the enemy, or bivouacked beside their horses ready for any emergency. The extreme tension necessitating all these precautions may be relaxed somewhat now, but still we rely on the mounted troops for information of every movement among the besiegers, and so far trust in their alertness has been fully justified. The morning after last Thursday's attack Major Marling pushed his patrols of the 18th Hussars farther westward than they had been able to get since communications were interrupted. Rumours, since confirmed, that the Boers had suffered very heavily in their fruitless attack the previous day, suggested the possibility of their having evacuated some positions. Major Marling may have begun to take that view too when he saw a white flag showing above the serrated crest of Rifleman's Ridge, which is generally but too vaguely described as Blaauwbank, where the Boers have at least one powerful field-gun mounted. Under a responsive flag of truce Major Marling and a non-commissioned officer advanced to parley with the enemy, whose pacific, if not submissive, spirit was thus manifested. The field-cornet in charge said he understood there were to be no hostilities that day. The English officer knew nothing of any armistice, but agreed to retire without pushing the patrol farther in that particular direction. As he and his comrades went back to

join their main body, Boer sharpshooters opened fire on them treacherously from the rocks and sangars of Rifleman's Ridge. It is difficult to understand such wanton violations of every principle recognised by civilised belligerents, unless we assume that the Boers really thought that their General had claimed a truce in order that his dead might be buried, and that our cavalry were therefore at fault. It is, however, impossible to find excuses, or give the Boers credit for good intentions always in their use of the white flag. They seem to regard it as an emblem to be hoisted for their own convenience or safety, and to be put aside when its purpose has been served, without any consideration for the other party. Even while this Boer officer pretended to think there was a general truce that forbade scouting operations on our part there was a gun being got into position by men of the same commando, and other of the enemy's batteries were being either strengthened or moved to more advantageous points. The work was, however, interrupted by a furious thunderstorm and a night of heavy rain that brought the waters roaring down from the Drakensberg ravines to flood the Klip River far above the level at which some of its spruits can be crossed without difficulty at other times.

English people, as a rule, picture early summer in South Africa as a time of heat and drought. According to the calendar this is Natal's summer, when hills and veldt, refreshed by genial showers,

should be green with luxurious growth of young grass, or brightened by a profusion of brilliant wild flowers. But the seasons are out of joint just now. We get days of torrid heat, bringing a plague of flies from which there is no escape, and then a sudden thunderstorm sends the temperature down to something that reminds one of chill October among English moorlands. The sun hides its face abashed behind a misty veil, but the flies remain. Drizzling rain, with white mists in the valleys, and heavy clouds dragging their torn skirts about the mountains, also put a stop to the bombardment until an hour past noon next day.

Probably these conditions were less favourable to us than to the enemy, whose movements were completely masked, and when the clouds cleared some of his batteries on new positions were ready to join the diabolical concert that went on at intervals until dark. The concert, however, was mere sound and firing signifying nothing—except in its effect on nerves already unstrung—as we had no serious casualties that day. And the next brought peace, for the Boers do not willingly fight on Sunday, and we have no reasons at present for provoking them to a breach of the tacitly-recognised ordination that gives us one day's rest in seven with welcome immunity from shells. Their observance of the Sabbath, however, does not run to a total cessation of labour on the seventh day, and if they do not want to fight then they have no scruples about

turning it to account in preparations for a fight next morning. On this particular Sunday, while we were getting all the rest that a shell-worried garrison can reasonably expect, some of our enemies were labouring hard to mount a big gun on Surprise Hill, which rises from a series of stone-roughened kopjes where the Harrismith Railway winds nearly due west of Rietfontein or Pepworth's Hill, and about 4000 yards north of King's Post—one of our most important defensive works. In anticipation of this we had shifted one heavy naval gun to Cove Redoubt, which is well within that weapon's range of Surprise Hill, but can hardly be said to command it, as the latter has an advantage in point of height. We had also, however, lighter artillery bearing on Surprise Hill, and in some measure enfilading its main battery, behind which, and in echelon with it, they had apparently placed a howitzer.

Cannonading opened from many quarters soon after daybreak, the enemy's fire being mainly directed against our naval guns, one of which, however, devoted itself exclusively for a time to the Surprise Hill battery where the Boers were preparing for action. Before they could get many shots out of the new gun, we were pounding away at it. Our first two shells fell short, but they were followed by three others, clean into the battery's embrasure, with such obvious effect that the big weapon inside must either have been dismantled or put out of action. Since then it has not spoken, and the sailors there-

fore naturally claim that they have silenced it for good and all. An hour later the other naval gun—"Lady Anne" by name—silenced "Puffing Billy of Bulwaan" for a time, and we have evidence that the Boers must have suffered some serious losses before noon, when General Joubert sent in a flag of truce, according to a custom which seems to be in favour with him, whenever things are going a bit awry from his point of view.

The Irish-American, who has been mentioned as having given himself up as a deserter, described how the Boer gunners, terrorised by shrapnel fire, had to be forced into the batteries under threats. But if the Boer gunners are panic-stricken they have a curious way of showing it, for some of them stood boldly on the parapets to watch the effect of a shot, and the accuracy of their return fire does not betray much nervousness. We are inclined to believe, however, that the Boer losses from artillery fire have been greater than ours, partly because their shots have been widely distributed in a speculative way with no particular object in view, while ours have been aimed directly at the enemy's batteries, or at sangars, to which their gun-crews retire between the rounds; and partly, if not mainly, because our naval guns fire common shell with bursting charges of black powder, the effect of which—though not so violent locally as that of the Boer shells, charged with melinite explosive — is spread over a much wider area. It is not much satisfaction, however, for

the losses and worry we endure here to know that the investing force suffers even more severely so long as it continues to harass us while we remain inactively helpless.

The men were beginning to say that they had stood this sort of thing long enough, when the measure of their discontent was filled to overflowing this morning by a bombardment fiercer than ever. It opened with the barking of "Pom-Poms" as early as half-past five, and ran through the whole gamut from lowest bass of a big gun's boom to the shrillest scream of smaller projectiles and the whip-like whistle of shrapnel bullets lashing the air with so little intermission that within two hours no less than seventy-five shells had burst in and about Ladysmith camp. This was too much to be borne patiently, and every soldier welcomed the order for an offensive movement, their only regret being that infantry were to play no part in the affair. General Brocklehurst, with a force of cavalry, Imperial Light Horse, and artillery, moved out of camp soon after nine o'clock, taking the road that leads westward and southward through the gap at Range Post. The object of that movement was generally believed to be an attack on Blaauwbank, or Rifleman's Hill, as it is officially called, and the capture of a Boer battery there, from which our defensive lines between King's Post and Cove Redoubt had been repeatedly enfiladed. If successful in driving the enemy back, our troops would then swing round to their left and

go for the big gun on Middle Hill, against which General Brocklehurst's brilliant but futile reconnaissance of the previous Friday had been directed.

Three field batteries, posted on spurs along the line from Waggon Hill towards Rifleman's Post, covered the advance by shelling in turn all the Boer guns that could be brought to bear on the open ground across which our troops had to pass. Thus challenged, the enemy's artillery replied briskly, but their fire was a bit wild, and, regardless of shells that fell thick about them, the Imperial Light Horse, numbering no more than ninety rifles, led by Colonel Edwardes, who has succeeded the heroic Chisholm in command of this dashing corps, pushed forward to seize Star Kopje and prevent any Boer movement towards that point from Thornhill's Farm.

Hussars went forward in support of the Imperial Horse, galloping like scattered bands of Red Indians across the green veldt, where a spruit runs down to Klip River, until they had passed the zone of hostile fire, and then re-forming squadrons with a precision that was very pretty to watch. Other cavalry were in reserve, massed behind folds of the undulating slopes hidden from some Boer guns and beyond the effective range of others. There was force enough for any work in hand, but not quite of the right composition. To drive Boer riflemen off a rough ridge along which they can retire from one position, when it gets too hot for them, to another, nothing

will do but infantry of some sort, and preferably with a bayonet sting left in them for final emergencies. This was an occasion of all others when infantry regiments might have changed the whole course of events to our advantage, but for some reason they had been left in camp.

For nearly three hours our batteries shelled the Boer kopjes, expending much ammunition with perceptible effect on the brown boulders and presumably on anything animate that might be hidden behind them; we watched many Boers gallop away in haste across the plain, as if unable to stand the leaden hail longer, and one of our batteries advancing boldly got into position, whence it should have enfiladed that of the enemy and wrought havoc among their horses if any were concealed in the adjacent hollows. What effect the terrific shrapnel fire really produced we had no means of knowing. Hardly a Boer showed himself while that hurricane of bullets fell, but when General Brocklehurst meditated an assault on the hill his troops were met by a furious rifle fire. The ninety Imperial Light Horsemen of Colonel Edwardes's command were obviously too few to dislodge the Boers from the ground they had held so stubbornly. Further waste of artillery ammunition seemed useless, and the time for employing cavalry to any purpose had not come. We therefore had the chagrin of watching another force retire without accomplishing its object, and most of us felt from that moment grave

doubts whether another such chance of breaking the bonds that envelop us could come again until reinforcements were at hand for the relief of Ladysmith. As our troops withdrew they were shelled right and left by Boer guns that had been almost silent until then. Our batteries, aided by Captain Kinnaird-Smith's two Maxim-Nordenfelts, covered the retirement, but they could not put Surprise Hill out of action, or even attempt a reply to the redoubtable "Long Tom" of Pepworth's Hill, who on this occasion surpassed himself by throwing three shells in succession on the road by Range Post Gap from a distance that must be well over 9000 yards. The bit of hilly road where these shells fell and burst is no more than fifty yards long by fifteen wide, and could not have been visible to gunners five or six miles off without the aid of telescopic sights. Yet the aim was so accurate that one shell fell between two hussar squadrons and another just in rear of a battery, but without hitting man, horse, or gun. "Long Tom" has done better in long-distance shooting, having thrown one shell nearly to Cæsar's Camp, and the range-finders make that out to be 11,500 yards from Pepworth's Hill, but these three shots to-day hold the record for range and accuracy combined.

During the following three weeks the already wearisome progress of the siege was broken by no large event. The Boers, discouraged by their want of success on 9th November, went on from day to day shelling the town

with the guns already in position, and mounting others on the hills with which to make the bombardment more effective. They hoped to do slowly at a safe distance what they had failed to accomplish by a more daring procedure. The period, notwithstanding, is full of minor incidents, the record of which must be read with the greatest interest. Mr. Pearse wrote:—

November 15. — Half an hour after midnight all Ladysmith woke from peaceful slumber or troubled sleep at the sound of guns, from which shells came screaming about the town and into camps that had not been reached by them before. What it all meant nobody could say, but the firing did not cease until every Boer cannon round about our position had let off a shot. Some of us began to dress, thinking that the misty diffused moonlight was the coming of dawn. Women, huddling in shawls and wraps, rushed off with children in their arms to "tunnels" by the riverside, and there would have been something very like a panic among civilians if soldiers had not reassured them. The staff officer, who had been upon the watch for possibilities, until he heard the first Boer gun fire, and then got into pyjamas for a good night's rest, saying, "There will be no attack now," was a philosopher. Everybody cannot look at things in that cool way when shells are flying about, but a good many of us went back to bed again on discovering what the time was, puzzled to account for the evening's extraordinary freak, but confident

that it would not be repeated until daybreak. That brought drizzling rain and mists that have veiled the hills all day, putting a complete stop to all hostilities. We know nothing yet that can account for the firing of so many guns, and only attempt to explain it on the supposition that our enemies, being apprehensive of a renewal of yesterday's attack, were startled by some false alarm. Not knowing from which direction the expected blow might be struck, they fired guns all round to keep everybody on the alert.

November 16. — We are becoming accustomed to the daily visitation of shells that do not burst, and perhaps familiarity is beginning to breed carelessness. If so, the 40-pounder on Lombard's Kop gave us timely reminder this morning that he is not to be ignored with impunity. One shell thrown over the railway station burst in air, as it was intended to do, and scattered its hail of shrapnel bullets about that building. One guard, a white man, was killed on the spot or only breathed a few minutes after being hit, and two Kaffir labourers were wounded. Scores of bullets went into the station-master's office, and the desk at which he generally sits was perforated like a cullender. In these times of siege that official would not be always on duty, and he was just then taking a lucky hour off. A Boer movement, probably of some convoy with loot from down country, was going on along the road from Bulwaan towards Elandslaagte. Boer field

guns covered it, keeping our scouts in check on the plain, and riflemen created a diversion with pretence of an attack on Observation Hill, which spluttered out slowly. Major Howard, 5th Dragoon Guards, has been recommended for the Victoria Cross in recognition of his gallantry on "Mournful Monday," when, seeing a trooper fall, he walked back where bullets were falling thick, and brought the wounded man back on his shoulders in full view of several regiments. The Boers, inappreciative of pluck in that form, kept up a steady fire on the wounded trooper and his heroic officer until they were safe out of range.

November 17.—The 5th Lancers, who, with a company of King's Royal Rifles, are holding Observation Hill, have hit upon a happy idea for drawing Boer fire by deputy. They keep a man of straw for that purpose with khaki coat and helmet. By showing this now and then, they not only find out exactly where the Boers are, but get occasional chances of putting in a pot shot with effect. The suggestion probably came from Devonshire Hill, where Colonel Knox, who commands all divisional troops on that defensive line, had a dummy battery mounted. This drew fire from Boer guns at once, and gave Colonel Knox a good suggestion as to the sort of earthworks best adapted to resist the artillery fire that could be brought to bear upon them. At three o'clock this afternoon rain began to fall steadily, and mists crept about the hills, putting a stop to further bombardment.

Sunday, November 19.—Just after midnight Boer guns again fired from every position round Ladysmith. What this may mean nobody knows. Perhaps it is a device for keeping Boer sentries on the alert, or there may have been a false alarm causing the enemy's batteries to boom off a shot each by way of signal, or probably the guns, fired at certain intervals, were sending on a code message to Colenso. Rumours, having their origin in the fertile imaginations of those who think that British troops can achieve wonderful things for our relief, crowd fast upon us. Now we hear of a column marching into Bloemfontein, and an hour later men tell gravely of a force under General French having captured Dundee. But by some means ill news travels faster even than these absurdly impossible rumours. A Boer doctor has been to Intombi Camp this morning and told the people there that our armoured train was captured yesterday or on Friday near Colenso, and many prisoners taken, including Lord Randolph Churchill's son. That was the doctor's way of cheering up our sick and wounded. We might have doubted the story, but circumstances confirm it, and we have so little faith in armoured trains that it seems quite natural for them to fall into the enemy's hands.

November 20.—Dense white mists rising from the river-bends, and spreading across the plains to hang in a thinner haze about the shady sides of hills, put a stop to bombardment most of the morning. Up to

noon there had been practically no shelling, but only an exchange of rifle-shots between Bell's Spruit by Pepworth and Observation Hill. The enemy, however, made up for lost time later by sending several shells into town and camp. One fell near Captain Vallentin's house, where Colonel Rhodes and Lord Ava shared the brigade mess; another, passing close to Mr. Fortescue Carter's house, where several officers of the Intelligence Staff live, shattered the church porch beyond; from Surprise Hill several came into the 18th Hussar camp, where three men were hit, one so badly that his leg had to be amputated; one into the Gordon camp, wounding Lieutenant Maitland and a private; and one from "Long Tom" of Pepworth's into the little group of tents that now serve for all that are left here of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. This shot must have been fired at a range of over 11,000 yards. It came down like a bolt straight from the blue overhead, penetrated the stiff soil to a depth of five feet seven inches, and rebounded on impact with some more solid substance at the bottom so quickly that it left the mark of its penetration perfect, and only broke up on reaching the surface again. In this case there was no burst, but only a detonation of the fuse. After nine at night we were astonished to see the beams of a searchlight sweeping Observation Hill. Our foes apparently had got an engine on the railway between Surprise Hill and Thornton's Kop with an electric light attached to it. They are evidently prepared to bring against us all

the scientific appliances of modern warfare. Two hours later artillery and rifle fire began, and continued for nearly an hour, but apparently nobody was any the worse for it.

November 21.—The cannonade begins again at daybreak with some shots at our scouts, who are trying to feel their way out through the scrub between Bulwaan and Lombard's Kop. The Boers have mounted a 40-pounder high-velocity gun on the spur of the latter, and give us a taste of its quality by throwing several shells into the Fusilier camp at Range Post and bursting shrapnel over the town. The bombardment finishes about dusk with some vicious shots from Bulwaan. After this we sit and watch the lightning which plays in forks and zig-zags and chains about the hills between us and Tugela River. For such picturesque effects there is a great advantage in being encamped on a height, so that the whole panorama of rugged kopjes, deep ravines where spruits or rivers sing, silent camp, and sleeping town stretches round one, bounded only by an amphitheatre of higher hills.

November 22.—From half-past eleven last night there was heavy musketry fire near the north-eastern line of our defensive works, and we thought the Devons were being attacked hotly, but it turned out to be nothing more than a fusilade from Boer rifles at some unknown objects. Our foes are evidently getting a little jumpy and apprehensive of a surprise by night. Sir George White sends out

later a flag of truce to protest against the persistent shelling of the Town Hall, where our sick and wounded are lodged temporarily under the protection of a Red Cross flag. Commandant Schalk-Burger is said to have replied somewhat insolently that he understands the Geneva flag is being used by us to shelter combatants. At any rate Intombi is the place for our sick and wounded, and he will not respect any other hospital flag. Curiously enough we accept this humiliation, so far as to remove the patients and provide for them a camping-ground where the tents cannot be seen; but the Red Cross flag still flies on the Town Hall. Again we watch the beautiful effects of almost continuous lightning, brilliant as moonlight, and then turn in before black clouds break in a terrific thunderstorm. I have remarked before on the advantage of being on a hill to watch the picturesque effects of a storm such as we have here. But there are some disadvantages, especially if you have to sleep in a patrol tent no higher than a fair-sized dog-kennel, and a tent-pole happens to give way. Then you wake with wet canvas flapping about you. The rain pours down in a deluge that makes you shiver at the mere thought of turning out to put the tent-pole right. Let the rain drift and the canvas flap with sounds like gunshots. It is better at any rate than lying as Tommy does on the hillside yonder with only one blanket to roll himself in, and with that thought, perhaps, you may be able to cuddle yourself off to sleep again in spite of the storm.

November 23. — Notwithstanding Sir George White's protest, Boer guns are still laid to bear on the Town Hall, and shells frequently fall in the enclosure near it, and have hit the building, sending splinters in all directions, by one of which a dhoolie-bearer was killed. This seems to me a scandalous violation of all the rules of civilised warfare, which certainly entitle us to a field-hospital in addition to one at the base. If Schalk-Burger had objected on the ground that the Town Hall so long as it was used for sick and wounded came in the line of fire from his guns to our batteries or defensive works, he would have been within his rights, but all the same there would have been no truth in that contention, and at any rate it rests with him to clear himself from the charge of having fired on a Red Cross flag without warning. Meanwhile other guns on Surprise Hill have been searching for the 18th Hussars in their bivouac where Klip River runs through a deep ravine, and "Long Tom" of Pepworth's has thrown a shell into Mrs. Davy's house, opposite Captain Vallentin's, wounding its owner, who is the first woman hit, though numbers of them, having got over their first panic, go about their domestic duties all day as if there were no such thing as a bombardment, and never think of taking shelter in a riverside cave now. This shot brought upon "Long Tom" the vengeance of our Naval Battery, which must have battered him or his gunners severely.

All the afternoon Boer rifles have been dropping

bullets into posts held by the Rifle Brigade and Leicesters. Perhaps the men were showing signs of being harassed when General Hunter visited them. With a laugh he stood bolt upright on a rock, saying, "Now let us see whether these Boers can shoot or not;" and there he remained in full view of them for nearly a minute, while Mauser bullets hummed about him like a swarm of wasps. Such an act may seem like senseless bravado, but those who know Archibald Hunter well know that he had an object in giving this example of coolness and pluck.

November 24.—The Boers made a clever cattle-raid this morning. Twenty spans of trek-oxen had been sent to graze on the veldt between our outposts and Rifleman's Ridge in charge of Kaffir herd-boys. Slowly they grazed towards better pasturage, nearer and nearer to the Boer lines, from which shells in rapid succession were sent to burst just in rear of the herds. Mounted infantry of the Leicesters attempted again and again to herd the cattle back, but they were met each time by heavy rifle-fire, and at last two or three Boers dashing down the slope rounded up herd after herd with the dexterity of expert "cow-boys." Thus no less than 250 valuable trek-oxen fell into the enemy's hands, and we had the humiliation of looking on helpless while it was being done.

The bombardment has been going on at intervals all day, from seven o'clock this morning until dusk, when Bulwaan sent several shells on to Junction

Hill, killing three men of the Liverpool Regiment and wounding eight. This is the most fatal half-hour we have experienced since the siege began, but there was one lucky escape from a shell which burst in the guard tent among four men without hurting any of them. For the depression caused by these serious casualties there is some consolation in the rumour that "Long Tom" of Pepworth's has been knocked out for good and all. At any rate his last shot into the town was answered effectively by the naval 4·7, which sent a shell straight into "Long Tom's" embrasure, and he has not spoken or given any sign of life since. Without wearisome iteration it would be impossible to do justice day by day to the good work of the Naval Brigade under Captain Lambton. Without the heavy guns of H.M.S. *Powerful* our state here would be much worse than it is, and everybody in besieged Ladysmith appreciates the bluejackets, who are always cheery, always ready for any duty, and whose good shooting has done much to keep down the fire of Boer artillery.

November 25.—No hostilities disturb the quietness of morning or early afternoon, but it is never safe to count on this, and look-out men are kept constantly on the alert in each camp to give warning by sound of high whistle or gong when one of the big guns has been fired. Against "Silent Susan" such precautions avail nothing, for she wears no white-cloud signal—the flash of discharge can only be seen if you happen to be looking for it intently in the

right place. Close upon the heels of her report comes a shrill, fiendish whisper in the air, and by the time you hear that, the shell is overhead or has burst elsewhere. The Gordons and Imperial Light Horse, however, are not to be debarred from sport by considerations of that kind. They take all reasonable precautions and leave the rest to chance, with the result that they snatch some amusement out of circumstances that seem unpromising. This afternoon the Gordons had a Gymkhana, and got through it merrily to the entertainment of many friends before a discordant note was heard from Boer batteries. The bombardment did not begin until half-past six, and lasted only until dusk, the final shot being fired by our naval gun into some new works on Bulwaan.

November 26.—The Boers are busy preparing an emplacement for heavy artillery on Middle Hill, south of and flanking Bester's Ridge. Apparently they suspect us of doing similar work on the plain in front of Devonshire Hill, and their strict regard for the Sabbath does not run to toleration of Sunday labour on our part, so they send three shells in among some Kaffirs who are digging trenches with the harmless object of burying dead horses there.

November 27.—The Boers, grown bold with the success of their first raid, try another—this time with the object of cutting out horses that graze loose on the plain towards Bulwaan. But they have to do now with Natal Carbineers, many of whom, like

themselves, are veldt farmers, familiar with every trick of rounding up horses or oxen. In vain do the gunners of "Puffing Billy" throw percussion shells to drive the herd towards their lines. In vain are shrapnels timed to burst in a shower where Carbineers sweep round like Indian scouts to herd the startled horses back. The Volunteers do their work neatly, coolly, quickly, to the chagrin of Boers who wait in kloofs beyond Klip River for a chance of carrying off some valuable horses. In their disappointment the Bulwaan battery tries to get some consolation by shelling the camp of the Carbineers. The new gun which Boers were mounting yesterday on Middle Hill opened to-day, shelling first the Rifle Brigade piquets on King's Post and then the sangar of the Manchesters in Cæsar's Camp. It enfilades both positions with equal ease.

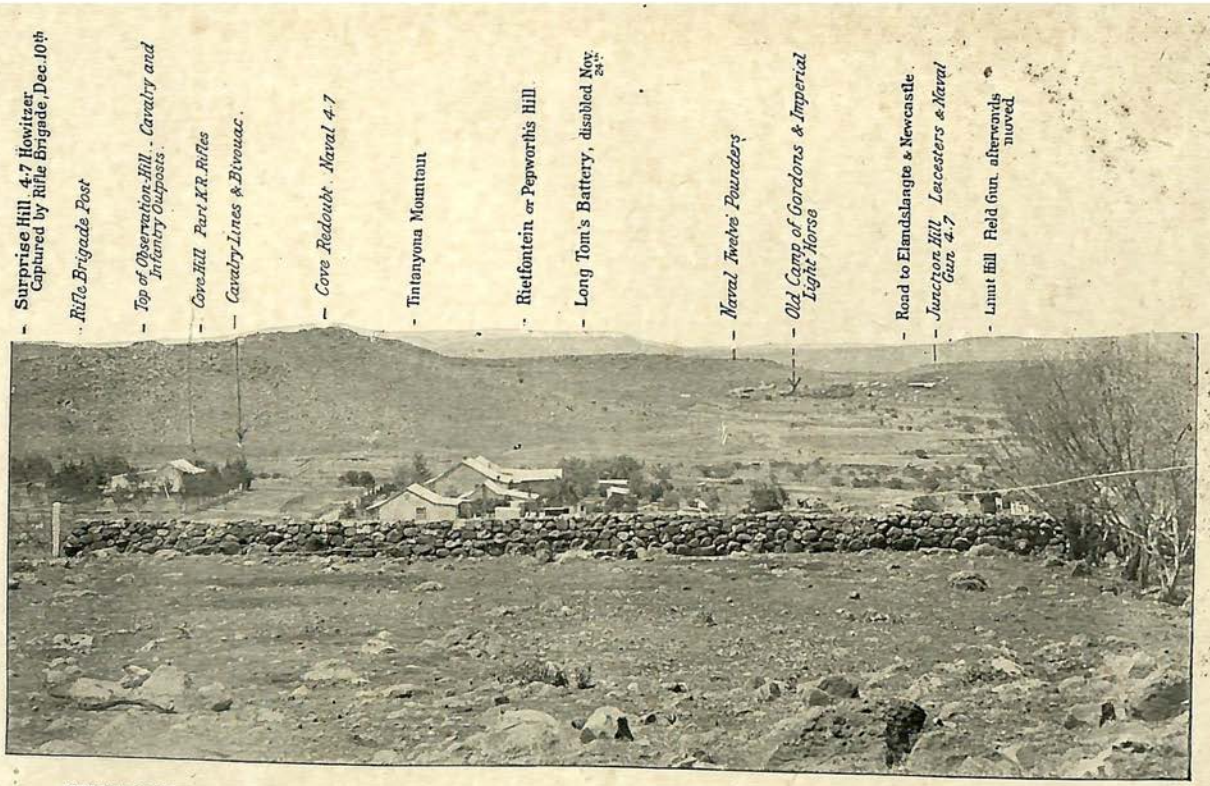
The Rifles had a narrow escape as they were at work on a wall, the top of which was struck by a shell, and splinters flew all round without hitting anybody. The Manchesters were not so fortunate, having three men wounded, but none seriously. While I write, smoking concerts are being held in the camps of Imperial Light Horse and Natal Volunteers, from whose strong lungs the notes of "God Save the Queen" roll in a volume that can be heard a mile off. Perhaps some faint echoes of it may stir the air about sleeping Boers on Bulwaan.

November 28.—A misty morning with rain, which does not prevent the enemy from sending a few shots

into town. Middle Hill, Rifleman's Ridge, Telegraph Hill, with its three 9-pounders, which the Rifle Brigade men, for quaint reasons of their own, name Faith, Hope, and Charity, all have a turn at us, and our batteries reply; but there is not much vigour in it on either side until Middle Hill, with its Creusot 94-pounder, and the howitzer on Surprise Hill, begin to shell our naval 12-pounders. There they touch Captain Lambton on a tender point, and he lets them have it back with a will. To-day we have been cheered by news of the victory over the Boers near Mooi River, but for Natal people satisfaction is dashed by the thought that if Boers are so far down they have raided the most fertile part of the Colony, and probably carried off pedigree cattle that are priceless.

November 29.—The night has been passed in preparing a surprise for the big Creusot gun on Middle Hill, which, because of his propensity for throwing shells into everybody's mess, has come to be known as the "Meddler." Deep gun-pits are dug on the northern slope of Waggon Hill, where on a nek they are screened by the higher spur from view of Middle Hill. In these pits two old-fashioned howitzers, throwing shells with sixty pounds of black powder for bursting charge, are mounted. Captain Christie, R.A., takes command of them and waits his chance, which does not come for a long time, the cannonade being at first confined to a duel between Captain Lambton's pet, "Lady Anne," and "Puffing

Billy" of Bulwaan. At length, however, the "Meddler" chimes in, and Captain Christie immediately looses off his two howitzers in succession. They cannot be laid by sights on the object aimed at, which is hidden from view. All has to be done by calculation of angles, and a fraction of error may make all the difference. So we watch anxiously while the shell —a long time in flight—follows its allotted parabola. One bursts just short of the work; but its companion, a second later, goes over the parapet and sends débris flying upwards in a mighty cloud. Thereupon the howitzers are christened promptly "The Great Twin Brethren," "Castor and Pollux," and "Puffing Pals," everybody selecting the name that appeals to his imagination most strongly. It matters little by what name men call them, so long as they can throw shells truly into the enemy's battery, and this they do steadily. The "Meddler" cannot reply to them effectively, and other Boer guns try in vain to reach them. At night a curious palpitating light on the clouds southward attracts attention. One Rifle Brigade man, who has a smattering of the Morse Code watches it for some time and mutters to himself, "X. X. X. Why, they're calling us up"; and before a signalman can be roused we see clearly enough these palpitations resolving themselves into dots and dashes. It is a signal from the south, flashed by searchlight across miles of intervening hills, but in a cypher which only those who have the key can read.


Surprise Hill 4·7 Howitzer
Captured by Rifle Brigade, Dec. 10th
Rifle Brigade Post
Top of Observation Hill. Cavalry and Infantry Outposts
Cove Hill Part K.R. Rifles
Cavalry Lines & Bivouac.
Cove Redoubt Naval 4·7
Tintanyona Mountain
Rietfontein or Pepworth's Hill
Long Tom's Battery, disabled Nov. 28th
Naval Twelve Pounders
Old Camp of Gordons & Imperial Light Horse
Road to Elandslangte & Newcastle
Junction Hill Leicesters & Naval Gun 4·7
Limit Hill Field Gun, afterwards moved

THE BRITISH POSITION AT LADYSMITH, LOOKING NORTH TOWARDS REITFONTEIN AND THE NEWCASTLE ROAD

Face p. 96

November 30.—Day breaks across white mists on the plain, and then comes gorgeous sunshine, with a glow of colour all round, brilliant orange in the east above Bulwaan, deepening to blood-red in the west behind the rugged crest of Mount Tintwa and the pitted peaks of Mont-aux-Sources. From daybreak onward there is heavy artillery fire on camp and town from every gun the Boers have mounted. Our howitzers and the "Meddler" began it with a merry little set-to between themselves, doing no harm. Then Surprise Hill, Telegraph Hill, Rifleman's Ridge, Bulwaan, and Lombard's Kop joined in, the last aiming straight for the hospital, with its Red Cross flag. Two shells had fallen close to that building, from which all haste was made to remove the helpless patients. Most of them had been got out when the third shot came crashing into the largest ward, and from among the ruins one dead man and nine freshly wounded were taken. Rifle fire quickened then about Observation Hill, and bullets flying overhead made many think that the Boers were coming on, but it all died away into silence without further casualties on our side. At night the column southward flashes another long signal on the clouded sky, and Boer search-lights try to obliterate it by throwing their feeble rays across the beam that shines like a comet athwart the darkness above Tugela heights.

December 1.—"Long Tom" of Pepworth's Hill, which has not fired since "Lady Anne" silenced it

days ago, is now reported to be cracked and useless, but the Boers are preparing emplacements for another heavy piece of ordnance on a flat-topped nether spur of Lombard's Kop, where they have a persistently disagreeable 40-pounder already mounted. We do nothing to prevent this increase of hostile artillery, but content ourselves with inventing new names for the batteries, so that the intelligence map may be kept up to date with fullest details. This spur henceforth is to be known as Gun Hill, probably because the weapon already in position there has made itself conspicuously unpleasant by shelling the headquarters and intelligence offices. From it three successive shells were fired this morning into or near the convent where Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, Major Riddell, and other convalescent wounded have their quarters. Middle Hill gun only fired a few rounds to-day, and was promptly silenced by our "Great Twin Brethren," the howitzers of Waggon Hill.

December 2.—We are not left long in doubt as to the meaning of those new works on Gun Hill. A Creusot 94-pounder has opened from there, shelling in rapid succession Sir George White's headquarters camp, the Royal Artillery, and the Imperial Light Horse, who have their parade and playground pitted by marks of this fire. People say that "Long Tom" has been shifted from Pepworth's to the new position, but the shells, with their driving-bands grooved deep and sharp, tell another story. It is a new gun, or little used, and probably fresh from Pretoria. Its

range is great, and gives easy command of the ravine in which our cavalry are bivouacked by the riverside. One shell has already burst there, wounding a man of the 18th Hussars, but fortunately the enemy cannot see the result of this fire, the river for a mile in length being screened from his view by intervening hills.

December 4.—One may skip Sunday when it is uneventful in its perfect peace, as yesterday was, and be deeply thankful for the rest that is given to us once a week when shells cease from troubling. The weather has changed suddenly from brilliant sunshine and almost tropical heat to cloudy skies that send the temperature down to shivering point. Few shells fell in the town this morning, when groups gathered at street corners discussing rumours of Lord Methuen's victory on Modder River, which are now officially confirmed. General Clery is also said to have defeated the Boers near Estcourt, but if so he did not get back the cattle they had looted, for we have watched them for hours driving great herds from southward up the roads that lead to Van Reenan's Pass.

Our batteries here have for once been most aggressive, shelling the enemy's position at Rifleman's Ridge vigorously, while the howitzers directed their fire on Middle Hill without drawing a reply from the 6-inch Creusot, which Captain Christie and his gunners believe to have been put out of action completely. His twin brother, "Puffing Billy" of

Bulwaan, was also silenced for a time, but has come back to quite his old form this evening, and threw several shells into the town and camps, where troops assembled to cheer the news of Lord Methuen's victory when it was read out in general orders.

December 5.—The bombardment has been slack again to-day: all the enemy's big guns silent. But there is great movement among the Boers, who are apparently holding a great council of war at General Joubert's headquarters. This may account for rumours of dissensions between the Free State and Transvaal commandos.

December 6.—Now we know what the firing of Boer guns all round Ladysmith at midnight of 19th November meant. It was a night alarm magnified by imagination into a desperate sortie from Ladysmith, and a correspondent of the *Diggers' News* telegraphed his version of the affair in glowing terms to that paper, giving full details of things that never happened. A copy just received in camp causes much amusement. Reference to my notes for the 19th of last month will show that we were at perfect peace here. Not a man of this force except the ordinary patrols moved on the night when we are reported to have made that strenuous but futile effort to break through the enemy's lines, and not a shot was fired on our side. The Boers must have been startled at their own shadows or at the movements of a subaltern's patrol which they magnified into an army, and having beat the

big drum they perhaps tried to justify themselves by sending that cock-and-bull story to Pretoria.

To-night our troops are out for exercise, marching through the streets, and singing or whistling merrily as they march. If the Boers get word of this they may have another scare. The daily bombardment is now so much a matter of course that one hardly makes a note of it unless some casualty brings home to us the fact that nobody is safe while shells fly about.

December 7.—During a heavy cannonade in which our naval batteries engaged Gun Hill and Bulwaan from six o'clock until ten this morning, women and children were walking about the streets quite unconcerned. Hundreds of shells have already fallen in the town, and there are some zealous statisticians who compile charts showing exactly where each shell struck and the direction from which it was fired, but the majority of us do not concern ourselves much about any that burst beyond a radius of fifty yards from our own camps or houses, and so many fall harmless that we seldom ask whether anybody has been hit, and it sometimes happens therefore that one does not hear of serious casualties except by accident. It comes rather as a surprise to find that our losses since the siege began, thirty-six days ago, amount to thirteen killed and one hundred and forty-eight wounded. A battle might have been won at less cost.

This evening the 6-inch Creusot on Gun Hill

was very active, directing its fire toward head-quarters at first, and then turning it on a building which has just been selected for the new Post Office, to be opened when communications are restored. It had a narrow escape of being blown to ruins by a shell that entered through the roof and exploded inside.

CHAPTER VII

THE SORTIES OF DECEMBER

Retribution—Sir Archibald Hunter's bold scheme—A night attack—Silently through the darkness—At the foot of Gun Hill—A broken ascent—"Wie kom dar?" "The English are on us!"—Major Henderson thrice wounded—Destroying "Leviathan"—Hussars suffer under fire—Rejoicings in town—Sir George White's address to the troops—Boer compliments—A raid for provender—A second sortie—The Rifles' bold enterprise—An unwelcome light—Cutting the wires—Surprise Hill reached—The sentry's challenge—The Rifles' charge—Boer Howitzer destroyed—The return to camp—Cutting the way home—Serious losses.

THIS constant shelling of the town could not go on for ever without some attempt being made to stop it. Mr. Pearse had himself urged the practicability of capturing or putting out of action at close quarters the Boer big gun which could not be dealt with by our shell-fire. This was now to be done. The Creusot gun just mounted on Gun Hill, which like its neighbours had been given a name and endowed with a personality by the nimble-witted among the garrison, was to pay the penalty of its crimes, and the enterprise of which this was the result formed one of the most brilliant incidents in the history of the siege.

Probably (writes Mr. Pearse) no corps within

our lines has been more deliberately shelled than the Imperial Light Horse, who were driven out of one camp by "Long Tom" of Pepworth's Hill, only to pitch their tents by the river bank within sight of "Puffing Billy's" gunners, who had got the range from Bulwaan to a nicety, so that they could pitch shell after shell into the new encampment. Even their "Long Tom" also still pounded at them by way of varying the monotony of a daily duel with our naval guns. But the most annoying fire of all came from the newly-mounted 6-inch Creusot on Little Bulwaan, which, for the sake of distinction, is known officially as Gun Hill, in front of Lombard's Kop. Having an effective range that enables it to search with shell every part of our camp that is visible, this weapon fired first in one direction, then in another, changing its aim so frequently that nobody could predict where the next shell might fall until it came hurtling through the air, in dangerous proximity, with a sound that suggests the half-throttled scream of a steam siren, and it generally finished, as it began, with a few shots at the Imperial Light Horse, or their near neighbours the Gordon Highlanders.

I do not know whether the idea of putting an end to the career of this worrying monster originated at headquarters, or grew out of the wish, frequently expressed by Imperial Light Horse and Natal Volunteers, to "have a go" at the enemy's guns—Sir George White has given the credit to General Sir

Archibald Hunter, and such an enterprise is worthy of the man who stormed the Dervish stronghold at Abu Hamed, and led his troops up to the flame of rifle fire that fringed Mahmud's zeriba on the Atbara. He kept the whole scheme so secret that he did not even let his aide-de-camp know anything about it until some time after dinner last night. Then he sent round a brief message to Colonel Royston commanding the Volunteer Forces of Natal, and to Colonel Edwardes of the Imperial Light Horse. In accordance with this order the troops detailed got under arms very quietly, taking all the ammunition they could carry, but leaving their horses and cumbersome equipment in the lines, for Sir Archibald had wisely resolved that all taking part in this expedition must march the five miles out, and get back as best they could on foot, neither troop horses nor officers' chargers being allowed to join the column. Lord Ava, who is attached to Brigadier-General Hamilton's staff, happened to be a guest of the Light Horse. Getting an inkling of some mysterious movement, for which officers were arming themselves like their men with rifles, he stole away to get a night free from galloper's duties, shouldered a Lee-Enfield, crammed a bandolier full of cartridges, and came back in time to join the ranks before they marched off.

It was then past ten o'clock; the crescent moon was "sloping slowly towards the west" behind a bank of dark clouds, and in another hour the faint

light would have gone, giving place to a gloom that makes rocks, trees, rough knolls, and deep dongas one shapeless black. General Hunter's instructions were brief and simple, silence being the point most strongly insisted on. For the rest, Imperial Light Horse and Carbineers, to whom he entrusted the attack, were to follow their guides and keep line if possible. These two corps contributed about one hundred men each. The Border Mounted Rifles, Natal Volunteers, and a small field force of Colonel Dartnell's Border Police, making altogether about four hundred, were to be in reserve, the Border Mounted furnishing supports and pushing them up the hill as each step in the ascent was gained. The fourteen guides, with Major Henderson of the Intelligence branch as staff officer, went ahead, and then the column moved off silently, the order being passed from section to section in whispers. The Boers, five miles off, would not have heard if a full band had played the adventurous six hundred out; but we know that there are Boer emissaries still in camp who might, by preconcerted signal, have given the alarm if the unusual movement had aroused them and their suspicions. It was well, therefore, to let such sleeping dogs lie. So the column marched in silence along town roads, where nearly every house is deserted, and deep dust muffled the tread of many feet until they were clear of the town, and passing our outposts on Helpmakaar Hill. The forms of massed men could

be made out dimly where the Devon battalion rested under arms, ready to give assistance in case of any reverse.

From that point the Helpmakaar road leads straight round a scrubby nek where the Boers have thrown up a formidable series of earthworks. To avoid these, the column struck off across open veldt into a hollow where men had to feel their way among stunted bushes of the "Wacht een bichte" thorn, and across dongas where the sandy banks crumbled under weights incautiously placed, and slid down with men into depths of six feet or more. After floundering about there they climbed out again to re-form with such regularity as was possible in the circumstances. But for the guides, who seemed to know every inch of ground, right directions would almost inevitably have been lost. As it was, however, they reached the foot of Little Bulwaan (or Gun Hill) at twenty minutes to two, and preparations were made for an immediate assault lest daylight should come before the work could be accomplished. Everybody knew full well how impossible it would be to get away from the position without terrible losses, if the Boers could see to shoot. It was pretty well known that not many of them occupied Gun Hill, but the number encamped within reach of it was a matter of pure speculation, dependent on the accuracy of Kaffir stories which might be true of one day, but quite untrustworthy twenty-four hours later; so rapid are the Boers in

their movements, if they get any suspicion that an attack is impending.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of keeping touch across rough ground, where silence was imposed, the different detachments, each with a guide to lead it, marched so quietly that not a word was spoken, and all arrived at their proper posts in admirable order, worthy of trained troops. That, however, became somewhat broken as the ascent began, and little wonder, for the boulders, rounded and worn smooth by the storms of ages, were slippery to tread on, and occasionally a man's foot would become wedged between them in a deep cleft. Here and there progress was painfully slow, and the hill so steep that it had to be climbed on hands and knees. The higher they climbed the worse it became, until, as one man describing his own experiences said, they were like a lot of lizards crawling over rocks. Half-way up the hill they had a narrow escape from stumbling on a Boer picket. The sentry heard if he did not see the line of crouching figures that passed him like ghosts in the darkness with stealthy steps that must have sounded weird across the night stillness. In a voice huskily vibrant, he challenged, "Wie kom dar?" Getting no reply, he called again twice in louder tones, and then fired his rifle at nothing in particular. Then, the whole picket waking, or beginning to realise that danger was near, let off a volley, and voices were heard shouting to comrades on the ridge. "The English are on us,

Hans, Carl. Shoot! shoot!" A few shots came from so close to one flank of the Imperial Light Horse that Boers must have been lying there almost under the feet of our men, if they did not actually join the ranks for a time to escape detection. But a sound greeted their ears at that moment, and knowing what it meant, they scampered downhill without waiting to hear more. It was a ringing British cheer followed by strident commands to "Fix bayonets and give the devils cold steel." Begun by Major Karri Davis, the order ran along from Imperial Light Horse to Carbineers, who had not a bayonet amongst them, for irregular mounted infantry in this country do not carry such weapons. But they struck the butts of their rifles on rocks, and made a great clatter as if preparing for a bayonet charge, and cheered again and again for a good deal more than their actual numbers, while crags on each hand tossed the shouts to and fro in a mighty tumult. This was apparently too much for the small number of Boers who held the crest. Letting off bullets in rapid succession, until the magazines were exhausted, they turned and bolted, having hit only ten of our men, one of whom, the tallest trooper in the Imperial Light Horse, was badly wounded. In proportion to their numbers the guides suffered most, having four out of fourteen hit, though none very severely. The worst wound of all was from an explosive bullet similar to those used in Express rifles for big-game shooting, and many missiles of the same kind were

seen to burst with a flash like shells as they struck on stones round about, thus proving that the use of explosive bullets by Boers is not quite so rare as most of us have believed hitherto. Major Henderson received three wounds from buck-shot or "loupalin," one of which penetrated deeply, but caused so little shock at the time that he was able to keep pace with the best uphill. Nevertheless, "scatter guns" are not weapons proper to be used in warfare between civilised combatants.

Halting for a brief breathing space, now and again, at General Hunter's command, then following with all the speed they could muster where he and his aide-de-camp, Major King, led the Imperial Light Horse on the left, the Carbineers on their right made a final dash for the steepest climb of all, and, breathless, gained the ridge, to find that the Boers had quitted it, leaving not a man in defence of the guns. A great stroke of luck befell the Imperial Light Horse, who crossed the heights with their left flank opposite a Boer 12-pounder and Maxim gun. The latter they made a clean capture of, but the field-piece, being too heavy for them to carry off, was left to the tender mercies of the engineers, who soon had bracelets of gun-cotton round it, and the breech-pieces damaged beyond repair.

Meanwhile the right flank was sweeping round towards the main battery in expectation of meeting with some resistance from the gun's crew of "Big

Ben of Little Bulwaan." That weapon had, in virtue of similar qualities, succeeded to "Long Tom's" second title, but did not live long to enjoy it. The end of his active career was at hand when the Light Horse made their dash for him and found that he had been deserted by all his friends. It was poetical justice that Colonel Edwardes and Major Karri Davis of the corps which Big Ben had shelled most persistently should be first to lay hands on him and claim every part that could be taken away as a rightful trophy for the Imperial Light Horse. But Major Henderson, in spite of his wounds, General Sir Archibald Hunter, and Major King were in the redoubt at that moment, and therefore the honours are divided. Doctor Platt, of the Border Mounted, claims to have been among the first four in. Some of the Carbineers are also under the impression that they captured a gun, and though there is nothing to show for it, they deserve full credit for an important share in the night's success. A line was formed in rear of the battery, while engineers put rings of gun-cotton round Big Ben's muzzle and breech. Then fuses were set alight, and our men retired hastily beyond reach of the imminent explosion. After that engineers and artillerymen went back to make sure that their work had not been bungled, and saw with satisfaction that the gun-cotton had rent great holes through Big Ben's breech in two places, rendering him totally unfit for foreign service. This was the crowning act of a great achievement, and the force

that had aided in its accomplishment marched back to camp triumphantly just as day broke.

As a precautionary measure, in case there should be a reverse, and with the object also of cutting off any fugitive Boers who might fly, panic-stricken from Gun Hill, the 19th Hussars had gone earlier to make a demonstration by way of Limit Hill, towards Modder's Spruit, and destroy some Boer stores. With characteristic faith in the luck that has favoured bold cavalry enterprises so often, they pushed far forward and gained some valuable information at the risk of being cut off, but fortunately that did not happen. Meanwhile the 18th, jealous for the great reputation they have won as scouts, attempted a movement even more hazardous. In advance of General Brocklehurst's reconnoitring force one squadron of this regiment made straight for a position which the enemy was believed to hold in strength between Pepworth's and Surprise Hill. To do this they crossed near a deep cutting through which the Harrismith railway passes, and there came under a terribly heavy fire, against which even their hardihood was not proof. Retiring, they made a detour to avoid unnecessary exposure, and swept round two small kopjes, where not a Boer had been seen previously. But, as it happened, the stony ridges were full of riflemen, who, without emerging from their concealment, brought a furious fusillade to bear on the Hussars, who had to run the gauntlet at full speed, all but one, and he, with gallant self-

sacrifice, rode straight towards the nearer kopje, drawing the whole fire on himself, and thus giving his comrades time to get clear. Fortunately not a bullet touched him as he wheeled about, lay flat on his saddle-bow, and galloped after the squadron. Its retreat was covered by a very pretty movement of the main body and by salvos of shrapnel from our field batteries, with the naval guns chiming in. Then the reconnoitring force slowly withdrew across the plain towards Junction Hill, still under a rifle fire heavier even than we had to face on the slopes of Elandslaagte, though not so well directed. Several saddles, however, were emptied, bringing our losses in this affair up to five killed and seventeen wounded. Of these considerably more than half were 18th Hussars, whose ranks have been seriously thinned since they marched to Dundee less than eight weeks ago.

In camps and town everybody is elated to-day. Casting aside the sombre garb that was suitable to retirement, ladies have come forth clad in raiment that is festively bright to go a-shopping, as if there were no such things as shells to disturb them, and no cares greater than feminine frivolities. If the siege were at an end, and peace within sight, we could hardly be more joyously animated, and all because two hundred gallant fellows, led by a dashing General, have shown how Boer positions may be captured at night, and Boer siege guns silenced for ever with small loss.

Sir George White ordered special parades for the

afternoon of all volunteers, guides, Irregular Horse, and Frontier Police Force who had taken part in the attack on Gun Hill. Each corps had its own appointed place for the ceremony, and Sir George visited them in turn to congratulate them on their brilliant achievement. For the guides, who are attached as scouts, interpreters, and field orderlies to the Intelligence Staff, the General had special words of praise. Without their valuable aid the enterprise might have been doomed to failure, and he expressed high appreciation of their gallantry, not less than of the skill they had shown in guiding a column over difficult ground when there was not light enough to make a single landmark visible except the sky-line of Gun Hill. To the Imperial Light Horse he paid an equally flattering tribute. As the men of three companies were drawn up in line to receive him, "Puffing Billy" tried to put a spoke in their wheel by sending a shell very near one flank, and the line was accordingly broken into close column with a short front, so that it be hidden by house and trees from sight of the gunners on Bulwaan. At that moment Sir George White, with General Sir Archibald Hunter, General Brocklehurst, and a number of staff officers, rode to the ground, and were received by a general salute, to which the presence of two or three wounded men with arms in blood-stained slings gave emphasis, as they had no rifles wherewith to shoulder and present.

The officers on parade were Colonel Edwardes,

commanding, Major Karri Davis, Major Doveton, Lieutenant Fitzgerald, adjutant, Captain Fowler, commanding F Company, Captain Mullins, B Company, and Captain Codrington, E Company, with their subalterns, Lieutenants Brooking, Normand, Matthias, Pakeman, Kirk, and Huntley, all of whom had been in the fight except Major Doveton, who volunteered for it, but was compelled to stay in camp for field-officer's duties. His seniors had the privilege of first choice, and insisted on it, so there was nothing left for him but submission to the inevitable. As a tribute to the men whose heroic achievement is the brightest episode in this long siege, Sir George White's soldierly speech will interest readers at home. Addressing Colonel Edwardes, he said:

"General Hunter, who planned and carried out the very successful movement of this morning, has reported to me the very efficient help that he received from the men of the Imperial Light Horse as well as the other corps who were employed. When he told me last night that he was anxious to have a shy at the gun on Gun Hill, there was one thing that I determined on, and that was, that I would give him the best support that I could. I knew I could trust you to help on account of your knowledge of the business which you have taken in hand in this campaign, and on account of your bravery and your steadiness. I was also confident of your intelligent individual action in case there

might be any difficulty to overcome. I have come here to express to you my appreciation of the value of the work you did last night, and also to thank you for it. It will be a great pleasure to me to report to General Sir Redvers Buller, whose name brings confidence wherever it is mentioned, on the work you have done, not only on this occasion, but on every occasion when it has been my good luck to have your assistance. I have no doubt there is a great deal more hard fighting before us, and my only hope is that you will do as well in the future as in the past, so that I may be able to say at the end of this campaign as I now say in the middle of it, that your behaviour is an honour not only to your own country and colony, but to the whole empire. Colonel Edwardes, I don't wish to keep you any longer, owing to the circumstance that 'Long Tom' of Bulwaan may interfere in this conference, but once more I thank you one and all."

Lusty cheers were then given for Sir George White, General Hunter, General Brocklehurst, and Colonel Edwardes. Sir George White's appreciation of the heroic achievement is shared by Boer leaders, and in their case it is all the more flattering because expressed while they are smarting under the humiliation of a great loss. Dr. Davis, with another medical officer and some ambulance men, went up Gun Hill at daybreak under a flag of truce, to look after the wounded men who could not be found when their comrades came down in the dark.

Giving no heed to the Geneva Cross, some Boers made Dr. Davis and his companions prisoners, and they were taken before Commandant Schalk-Burger, who received them with scant courtesy at first. In the end, however, he paid a great compliment to the Light Horse on their plucky deed. One Boer officer who stood by said he thought they all deserved the Victoria Cross, and another showed familiarity with English habits of thought by describing the night attack as "a devilish sporting thing." They wanted to know who led it, and the answer has given Sir Archibald Hunter a place in Boer estimation among the British soldiers whom they would rather meet as friends than as enemies.

The Imperial Light Horse are celebrating their achievement by a brilliant gathering to-night, and have feasted their guests on so many good things that one begins to doubt whether there can be much scarcity in camp, though ordinary articles of food, and especially drink, are running up rapidly to famine prices.

Plenty in the Imperial Light Horse larder may however be accounted for by success in another night attack about which one did not hear so much, though it was carried out with characteristic dash as a preliminary to the greater enterprise that followed twenty-four hours later. One company of the Imperial Light Horse, being on outpost duty south of Waggon Hill, had conceived the idea of a midnight raid on Bester's Farm, whence the Boers, after an

effective occupation of several weeks, had retired, leaving a Red Cross flag still attached to a thorn bush in the garden, by way of suggesting that poultry and pigs should be regarded as under the protection of the Geneva Convention. They did not go far, however, and parties of them came down to the farm nearly every night for supplies. The Light Horse, having impartial minds, thought they might as well "chip in" for some of the good things. So they made their raid, and came back laden with provender. Much of this they distributed with a liberality that has won for them and for all Natal Volunteers concurrently the title of "friendlies," which will certainly stick as long as British troops and Colonial Irregulars campaign together. Some fat turkeys were part of the loot, and they helped to make a right royal feast to-night, when the gallant "friendlies" had their cup of happiness filled by warm congratulations from the Gordons, the Devons, and every cavalry regiment with which they are brigaded.

Such brilliant achievements as the above might, it was soon felt, be more difficult in future, the enemy having been put upon his guard; but all the good-comradeship in the world could not prevent some jealousy being felt, and nobody can pretend to regret that a spirit of noble emulation has thus been roused. There had never been any lack of men ready for work of that kind from the first day of investment. Devons and Gordons had volunteered weeks before to take the Boer guns from which the defenders suffered most annoyance, any night the General might give

them permission; but those fine battalions were wanted for important duties in the purely defensive scheme, and so they had to lie behind earthworks or in bomb-proof structures, half tent, half cave, shelled when they ventured to move out by day, kept on the alert through many hours of weary night, and called to arms again an hour before dawn. They had shown—and the same is true of every corps and detachment in the garrison—the most splendid endurance. Indeed, the only signs of impatience seen among the troops were the outcome of an eager desire to be led out against the enemy, that they might get some satisfaction for the losses and annoyance to which they had been subjected from the long-range fire of Boer artillery.

Now, however, the regulars, who had long been ready for any service, in view of the brilliant performance of the irregulars, regarded inaction as a slur upon their particular regiments. The feeling resulted in a second attempt being made, this time to destroy the enemy's big gun on Surprise Hill. Though it failed to win an equal success, it was a hardly less brilliant performance, and forms another engrossing page in Mr. Pearse's story. Writing on 11th December, he thus describes the enterprise from its inception:—

Lieut.-Colonel Metcalfe of the 2nd Rifle Brigade gave expression yesterday to a general desire that the regulars should be allowed a chance to prove their mettle, by sending to Sir George White a request that his battalion might be allowed to attack the Boer position on Surprise Hill and silence the howitzer there. This request had to be sanctioned by Brigadier-General Howard, who, as an old Rifle Brigade officer, was nothing loth to add strong

reasons why the step should be taken. Other corps might be panting for opportunities of distinction, but the Rifle Brigade, having held the post on Cove Hill which now bears its name under fire from this howitzer for weeks past, had a right to claim that their chance should come first.

Sir George White, fully appreciating Colonel Metcalfe's plea of privilege and the spirit that animated it, gave consent at once, and left Colonel Metcalfe free to carry out his plan unhampered by any conditions save those of ordinary military prudence. He did not even give the direction of it to a staff officer, and though the Intelligence Department furnished guides it took no active part in the affair, for the success or failure of which Colonel Metcalfe alone held himself responsible. Major Altham saw the column off and accompanied it for some distance, but only as a spectator, and that no farther than the initial stage, beyond which everything was shrouded in darkness. The new moon, sinking behind heavy clouds, gave little light when the men fell into rank by companies for their march. There were about 450 rifles all told. To these must be added two small detachments of artillery and engineers, taking with them charges of gun-cotton. The whole command numbered no more than 469, and they were going for one of the strongest Boer positions by which our force is ringed about.

Captain Gough's company was detached to lead

the right assault, and Major Thesiger's the left, each having with it a section of C Company. Captains Paley and Stephens were to bring their companies close up in support, while Lieutenant Byrne was in command of E Company, forming the reserve. Only a small detachment of ambulance men with four stretchers followed the column as it moved off a few minutes after ten o'clock, across open ground by Observation Hill, and turned westward towards its objective, which could just be seen, a dim rounded mass like a darker cloud in the dark sky. The guides Ashby and Thornhill had no difficulty in finding their way without other landmarks, for every inch of the ground is familiar to them both. An unlooked-for obstacle, however, presented itself as they neared the nek that joins Thornhill's Kop with Rietfontein on Pepworth's Ridge. A break in clouds that hung behind Surprise Hill let light through from the crescent moon that was still well above the rugged Drakensberg Crags.

In that light, subdued though it was, a man crossing the nek would have shown up sharply, and Boer sentries always keep well down where they can watch the sky-line. Our troops, naturally anxious not to discover themselves prematurely, lay down in a convenient donga and waited for darkness. There they had to lie an hour or longer, until the nearest ridges were again merged in the gloom of their surroundings, and the more distant hills became vague shadows, perceptible only to the

second sight of men who are familiar with Nature in all aspects. Then the column, moving silently, advanced towards the railway line, which few could see until they were stopped by the barbed wire that fences it on each side. The necessity for cutting this was another awkward hindrance. All officers, however, had come provided for such an emergency with wire-nippers. The anxiety was painfully tense as men listened to the sharp click of these instruments, and heard the severed wires drop with a clatter that struck harp-like across the deep silence, and went vibrating along the fence towards a Boer camp where perhaps some sentry, more alert than his comrades, might catch the meaning of such sounds. No alarm followed, however, as the work of wire-cutting went on across the railway and from enclosure to enclosure, care being taken to bend the wires only in one place so that they could be bent back, leaving a space just wide enough for successive companies in fours to defile through.

Thus by slow degrees they gained the foot of Surprise Hill, and began the difficult ascent. Colonel Metcalfe, and probably most of his men, expected that they would have been met by Boer rifle fire long before this and compelled to win their way with the bayonet. It seemed almost impossible to believe that the Boers, after one sharp lesson, would keep no better watch than to let us creep up to their stronghold unopposed. Suddenly a challenge "Wie kom dar?" rang out from half-way up the hill.

Silence would serve no longer, and indeed it had been broken again and again by the clang of iron-heeled boots on loose stones. So the order to fix swords was given, and passed in stentorian tones along the front. Sword-bayonets rattled sharply against rifle barrels to show that there was no deception this time, and then with lusty cheers the assaulting companies sprang forward, floundering at times in deep clefts between boulders, then re-forming to continue their advance, while the supports and reserves fell as quickly as they could into the formation that is roughly indicated in the accompanying diagram. That plan had been adopted to guard against flank attacks by the oblique fire from two companies, between which an opening was left for the assaulting companies to retire through in case of reverses. But neither flank attack nor reverses came at this critical point. Major Thesiger and Captain Gough, following their respective guides, gained the crest before their enemies had time to fire many shots from magazine rifles, and the battery was won. But it contained neither gun nor gunners. Was the whole expedition therefore fruitless? No! there came sounds as of men at work stealthily a few yards off.

For that point a sergeant led his section, and found the howitzer with a few men round it as escort, bearing rifles. The men threw down their arms in token of submission, but that trick has been played too often. "This damned nonsense is too late,"

said the sergeant, and with levelled bayonets his sections swept away the chance of treachery. So the story runs, and at any rate our men pushed forward without further opposition until they formed a half-moon overlooking the darkness in a deep valley that might have been full of foes. Into that darkness, therefore, they poured steady volleys for half an hour, while the engineers were trying to destroy the captured howitzer. Their first attempt failed owing to a defective fuse, but with the next gun-cotton charge a fracture was made so deep that the howitzer will never be able to fire a shot again. Then the riflemen retired, and as they reached a safe distance downhill they heard a mightier explosion. This also was the work of our engineers, who had found a magazine and blown it up with all the ammunition there.

But now from flanks and rear came heavy rifle fire. Colonel Metcalfe, thinking he was being fired on by his own supports, rode towards them, calling upon Captains Paley and Stephen by name to cease firing. But he was met by a withering volley, and knew it must have come from enemies. At the same time a sergeant going off in another direction, and calling, "Second Rifle Brigade, are you there?" was received by answers in English, and before he had discovered his mistake three rifle-bullets stung him, but for all that he managed to get back in safety to his company. Then the Adjutant-Captain Dawnay, assisted by Major Wing of the Artillery,

who had come out from camp as a volunteer unattached, did successful work in getting together sections that had gone astray in the intense darkness.

It was almost impossible to see anything a yard off. One man felt something brush against him, and said by way of precaution, "Third Rifle Brigade?" "Yes," was the response, but at that moment the rattle of a rifle warned him. He saw something white, which was certainly not part of a British soldier's campaigning uniform, and, driving at that, got his bayonet into a Dutchman's shirt just in time to save himself from being shot. An officer had an exciting bout with a Kaffir who was fighting on the Boer side, the weapon on one side being a broomstick that had been used as an alpenstock for hill-climbing, and on the other a Mauser rifle which the Kaffir had no chance to reload, so quickly were the blows showered upon him, and a bayonet-thrust delivered at hazard as he ran put an end to his fighting for the time at least. Our men were dropping fast from rifle shots, and they had somehow missed touch with Captain Paley's company. That officer's name was called several times, but no answer came until the Boers on one side began shouting in good English, "Captain Paley, here is your company, sir," and a few men decoyed that way were shot down. The difficulty of finding wounded comrades in the darkness was great, but still several gallant fellows made the attempt, and brought no less than thirty-five out of the fight over ground

so broken that they frequently stumbled and fell with their groaning burdens. One of them begged to be left there, but his entreaties were met with the response, "Oh, cheer up, old chum; a stretcher in camp is better than a cell in Pretoria."

While these gallant acts of mercy were being done by men whose blood had been at fighting heat but a few minutes before, their comrades were forming for a charge on dongas thick with Boers, whose rifles rang out incessantly. Bayonets soon did their work. Before that charge the Boers would not stand, but fled off to fire from a safer distance. One lying wounded held some papers up, and said, "I am an American correspondent"; but unfortunately for him he had a rifle in his hand and it was hot. Captain Paley, at first returned as missing, was, as it happens, leading that charge at one point. Hearing calls for him he led his company towards them, but likewise found himself discovered, and had just ordered the charge when three bullets bowled him over, and he lay there until the enemy came at dawn and found him with other wounded; but his fall was quickly avenged, for his company charged gallantly, and made a way for themselves clean through the Boers. Colonel Metcalfe succeeded in bringing the main body of his troops away in unbroken formation, the detached sections following, and quickly falling into order ready for another fight; but the Boers did not molest them again, though we know now that reinforcements numbering

over 2000 had been specially sent that night to guard against a possible attack on Surprise Hill.

When our ambulance detachments went forward at daybreak they were fired upon, though Commandant Erasmus had sent under a flag of truce asking that surgeons and burying parties should go out from our camp. The medical staff were also made prisoners, and sent before Erasmus and Schalk-Burger, who, after many questions, released them with the most seriously wounded, among whom was Captain Paley. Lieutenant Ferguson died before he could be brought in. Our losses in this night attack, or rather in the fight that followed it, were 11 killed and 43 wounded, including Colonel Metcalfe slightly, Captain Paley, Captain Gough, Lieutenant Brand, and Lieutenant Davenport.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER COLENSO

The Town-Guard called out—Echoes of Colenso—Heliograms from Buller—The Boers and Dingaan's Day—Disappointing news—Special correspondents summoned—Victims of the bombardment—Shaving under shell fire—Tea with Lord Ava—Boer humour: "Where is Buller?"—Sir George White's narrow escape—A disastrous shot—Fiftieth day of the siege—Grave and gay—"What does England think of us?"—Stoical artillerymen—The moral courage of caution—How Doctor Stark was killed—Serious thoughts—Gordons at play—Boers watch the match—A story by the way—"My name is Viljoen"—How Major King won his liberty—A tribute to Boer hospitality—General White and Schalk-Burger—A coward chastised—"Sticking it out."

THE week that followed the sortie to Surprise Hill must have been one of intense anxiety to Sir George White and his Staff. The attack on the enemy's gun positions coincided with General Sir Redvers Buller's preparations to force the passage of the Tugela at Colenso, and to march to the relief of Ladysmith. This, however, was not generally known in the town, which was engaged by what was taking place nearer at hand. On 12th December Mr. Pearse wrote:—

The big gun on Middle Hill, which the great "Twin Brethren" had put out of action some days before, was taken to Telegraph Hill and mounted in a

strong position, whence its shells reached Cove Ridge, King's Point, and other defensive works with unpleasant persistency. Captain Christie's howitzers were therefore removed to a bend of Klip River, with the object of subduing this gun's fire again, if possible. It was apparently expected that the Boers would attempt reprisals for our night attacks. The Town Guard and local Rifle Association, having been duly embodied, were called out to line the river bank facing Bulwaan, and to assist in the defence of their town, but the Commandant still remained at Intombi Camp with sick, wounded, and non-combatants.

On December 15, the day of the disastrous attempt at Colenso, General Buller's guns could be plainly heard. Mr. Pearse has the following entries in his note-book:—

December 16.—Except for a bombardment heavier than ordinary, the past three days have been uneventful. Sounds of battle reached us in a dull roar from the distant southward. They grew more continuous yesterday, but rolled no nearer, and therefore told us nothing except that Sir Redvers Buller was making a vigorous effort to join hands with beleaguered Ladysmith, and that the Boers were with equal stubbornness trying to beat him back along the banks of the Tugela. From far-off Umkolumbu Mountain heliograph signals were flashed to us occasionally, but in cipher, the meaning of which is known only at headquarters. At dawn this morning the Boers celebrated Dingaan's Day by a royal salute from the big

Creusot on Bulwaan and fourteen other guns. All fired shells, which fell thick about the camps, killing one Artilleryman, one Gordon Highlander, and a civilian; several other men were slightly wounded by splinters, but none seriously.

December 17.—Depressing news is now made public from Sir Redvers Buller, who made his effort on Friday for the relief of Ladysmith and failed. He bids us wait in patience for another month until siege artillery can reach him. The special correspondents were summoned in haste this morning to hear an abridged version of the heliograph message read. They were asked to break this news gently to the town before unauthorised editions could get abroad, but somehow the ill tidings had travelled fast and with more fulness of detail than the Intelligence Department thought fit to divulge. There has been gloom over Ladysmith to-day, which blazing sunshine cannot dispel, and Colonials in their anger use strong language, for which a temperature of 107° in the shade may be in some measure accountable.

Mr. Pearse's notes for the next few days are mainly devoted to the bombardment, which now became hotter and more persistent than ever, their success at the Tugela having inspired the enemy with new hopes of reducing the town. On Monday the 18th

the shelling began at daybreak, and lasted with little intermission until nearly dark from Boer guns all round our positions. Bulwaan began by throwing

a shrapnel, which burst low over the camp of Natal Carabineers when the men were at morning stables. Four of them were killed, seven wounded, and a private of the Royal Engineers so badly hit that he lingered only a few hours. The same shell killed eleven horses in the Carabineer lines. In the town many people had narrow escapes when Bulwaan's 6-inch Creusot swept round, bringing its fire to bear with destructive effect on several prominent houses. One man lying in bed had a shell pass over him from head to foot within a few inches of his body. It burst on striking the floor, and well-nigh stifled him with dust and sulphurous fumes. When Bulwaan ceased Telegraph Hill began throwing shells even to the Manchester sangars on Cæsar's Camp, wounding three or four men, and one private of that regiment was killed by a Pom-Pom shot from the ridge beyond Bester's Farm.

On the following day, an hour after dawn, the shelling became hot about headquarters, then, however, changed its direction nearer to Captain Vallentin's house, in which Colonel Rhodes was generally found about breakfast, lunch, and dinner-time as a member of the 7th Brigade mess. Later the Police Station, or some building near it, seemed to have a curious fascination for the gunners of Bulwaan. They dropped shells now in front, then in rear, of the Court-house, but always in the same line, so that, for half an hour or so, Colonel Dartnell and his men had a warm time. One of their tents was

hit, but luckily nobody happened to be in it at that moment. On Wednesday the 20th, too, one of the first shells from Bulwaan burst close to the Police Camp after passing through a row of slender trees and along the fence, inside which Colonel Dartnell's orderly was just preparing to shave. He had his looking-glass on a rail of the fence, when between it and himself, a distance of not more than two feet, the shell ripped with a deafening shriek, to bury itself and burst by the root of a tree not three yards off. How this man escaped death is a wonder. The wall behind him was scarred by splinters, the iron fence in front torn and twisted into strange shapes, the rails crushed to matchwood by the force of concussion. Yet there he stood unscathed in the midst of it all. He had not heard the shell coming until its burst stunned, and for nearly a minute afterwards he remained motionless, too dazed to know what had happened.

In the afternoon (writes Mr. Pearse) Lord Ava and I rode out to have afternoon tea with the officers of Major Goulburn's battery on Waggon Hill. Some Boers apparently had a larger and more festive gathering in the dismantled fort on Middle Hill. They were well within range of our 12-pounder, and the middy in charge was very anxious to have a shot, but Major Goulburn decided not to waste ammunition in breaking up that tea party or 'dop raad.' I confess this seemed to me a mistake, for Boers were sniping across Bester's Valley with such persistency that we had to keep

a sharp watch on our knee-haltered ponies lest they should stray towards the dangerous zone, where one man of the Manchesters was killed directly he showed himself. There would have been some satisfaction in a reprisal, but orders are very strict against wasting ammunition, of which by the way we have none to spare that might not be wanted if the enemy should venture on a general attack.

On the same evening the Boers on Bulwaan signalled to the Gordons at Fly Kraal Post—"Where is Buller now? He has presented us with ten guns in place of three you took."

What seemed like the answer came on the following day, the 21st, when we have the following entry:—

Sir Redvers Buller's heavy batteries opened fire early this morning from some position south-west of Colenso. We feel, though we have no means of knowing for certain, that large reinforcements must have been sent that way recently from round about Ladysmith, leaving the lines of investment comparatively weak. Our enemy, however, makes a great show of being strong here by keeping up a more vicious bombardment when the situation threatens to become warm for him along the Tugela. His object, of course, is to discourage any diversion on our part, and it succeeds, because we have no motive for action yet. It is hard to have been cooped up for fifty days under fire, but we must make the best of it.

After trying in vain to reach the ordnance stores this morning Bulwaan got the range of headquarters. One shell burst a few yards short, the next crashed into Sir Henry Rawlinson's room, smashing all the furniture to atoms. Sir George White was lying in another room ill of a low fever, and there was naturally much anxiety on his account. For a long time he refused to be moved, but at length, under pressure of the whole staff, gave way, and consented to change his quarters to a camp less exposed. Immunity from shell fire is hardly possible within our lines now, for the Boers have mounted another howitzer on Surprise Hill to-day, and this, with the big Creusot still on Telegraph Hill, will probably search many places that have hitherto been comparatively safe, for our howitzers cannot keep down the fire of both.

December 22. — This was a day of heavy calamity for one regiment, and marked by more serious casualties than any other since the siege began. At six o'clock this morning a shell from Bulwaan struck the camp of the ill-fated Gloucesters on Junction Hill just as the men were at breakfast. It killed six and wounded nine, of whom three are very seriously hurt. A little later the big gun on Telegraph Hill threw a shell into the cavalry lines. It burst among the 5th Lancers, who were at morning inspection, and wounded Colonel Fawcett, Major King, a captain, the adjutant, a senior lieutenant, the regimental sergeant-major, a troop sergeant-major, and a sergeant. The last had an eye knocked

out, but the others were only slightly wounded, and when their injuries had been looked to, they all formed in a group to be photographed.

December 23.—After early morning on Saturday came a strange lull in the bombardment, and people who count the shells as they fall, for lack of other employment, found their favourite occupation gone. Even the pigeons that are kept in training here for future military use seemed reluctant to fly in the still air, missing probably the excitement of sounds that urge them to revel in multitudinous cross-currents when shells are about; and long-tailed Namaqua doves flitted mute about the pine branches, as if unable to coo an amorous note without the usual accompaniment. Quiet did not reign all day, however. Towards evening the enemy's gun on Rifleman's Ridge, or Lancer's Nek, opened straight over the general's new quarters, to which Sir George White had only changed half an hour earlier. This may be merely a coincidence, but it is strange that no shells have fallen near his house at the foot of Port Road since he quitted it. Artillery could be heard southward at intervals pounding away with dull thuds like the beats of time on a big drum muffled. But we have almost ceased to speculate on the meaning of such sounds—while they come no nearer this way there is no message of relief to us in them, and we are getting reconciled to the idea of waiting, irksome though it may be and heavy with many unpleasant possibilities.

Ladysmith had now been for fifty days under the fire of the enemy's guns. The situation after Sir Redvers Buller's first failure to relieve the town, as has been seen, grew more serious, and although it was very far indeed from what could be regarded as critical, there is to be remarked in telegrams and letters of this period a growing appreciation of its irksomeness. But dark as the sky looked it was flecked by many a brighter patch. There was a gay as well as a grave side to life in the besieged town, and to both Mr. Pearse does justice in a letter written on 21st December under the heading, "Amenities of a Siege." It is as follows:—

We have done our best to endure shells, privations, and the approach of a sickly season with fortitude if not absolute cheerfulness, and our hope is that though the position here may not seem a very glorious one, it will be recognised henceforth as an example of the way in which British soldiers and colonists of British descent can bear themselves in circumstances that try the best qualities of men and women.

"I wonder what they think of us in England now? Do they regard us as heroes or damned fools for stopping here?" asked an officer of the King's Royal Rifles with comic seriousness. This question was transmitted in a slightly varied form by heliograph signal to our comrades south of the Tugela one day, and the answering flashes came back, "You are heroes; not——" Here the message was interrupted by clouds, and lost in a series of confused dashes which the receiving

signaller could not read. We flatter ourselves, however, that the missing words were full of generous appreciation.

There is little enough reaching us from the outer world calculated to "buck up" troops who feel the ignominy of having a passively defensive rôle thrust upon them for "strategic reasons," cribbed, cabined, and confined within a ring of hills by forces believed to be inferior to their own, and exposed daily to shell fire, which, if not so destructive as our enemies intend it to be, brings a possible tragedy with every fragment of the thousands that fall about us. Counting eight hundred bullets and jagged bits of iron within the bursting area of one shrapnel shell from Bulwaan, a civilian expressed wonder that anybody should be left alive in Ladysmith after forty days of bombardment. Since then the shelling has been even hotter and more destructive; but, fortunately, Boer guns do not fire many shrapnel, nor do the shells burst always in places where they can do most damage. Many portions of the camp unprotected by works in any shape cannot be seen from the enemy's batteries, and though often searched for by shells thrown at haphazard, our Cavalry, Artillery, and Army Service lines have frequently escaped being hit by a good fortune that seems almost miraculous. One day three successive shells fell and burst between the guns of a battery, but the artillerymen, standing by their harnessed horses, did not move or seem to take any notice of the vicious visitors. Such

is the etiquette of a service which, while firmly believing in the efficacy of its own fire, is trained to ignore that of an enemy's guns. Nevertheless gunners, like less stoical mortals, appreciate the value of bomb-proof shelters when shells are flying about; and experience, during this siege of Ladysmith, should have taught us all the dangers of carelessness when by timely discretion many calamities might have been averted.

But many people have not the moral courage to show caution when warned that shots are coming, so they stand still and take their chance instead of seeking shelter; or possibly it might be more just to say that fatalism in some form arms them with a fortitude which cannot be shaken by shells. Soldiers on duty stick, as a matter of course, to their posts, or go straight on with work that has to be done whatever the dangers may be; but just now I am not thinking so much of them as of civilians and troops in their leisure moments, for whom exposure is not a necessity. The townsfolk can, if they choose, find almost absolute safety by spending their days in cool caverns beside the river, or bomb-proof shelters cleverly constructed near their own houses; and care has been taken by the military authorities to provide every defensive position round the open camp and town with shelter trenches and covered ways, where soldiers off duty may rest secure from the heaviest shell fire. Yet after all there is much to be said in favour of the fatalists who put their

trust in a Power greater than human agencies or foresight can control. They, at any rate, do not meet troubles half-way or suffer the terrible depression that leaves its traces on those who pass their days in dark damp caves, and only venture forth at night when danger seems to have passed, though that is by no means certain.

In one of my early telegrams to the *Daily News*, sent by Kaffir runner, I told briefly how Dr. Stark met his death at a time of apparent security. Descended, I believe, from one of the most famous of West-Country Nonconformists, he held views strongly in sympathy with what he regarded as the legitimate aspirations of an eminently religious community, and he came here as a visitor from England with the avowed object of giving medical care to any wounded enemies who might fall into our hands. When Boer shells began to burst about our ears Dr. Stark was the most practical advocate of caution. He would leave the Royal Hotel at daybreak every morning or even earlier, carrying with him a pet kitten in a basket, and sufficient supplies for a whole day up to dinner-time. When the light began to fade so that gunners could hardly see to shoot straight, and therefore ceased firing, he would emerge from his riverside retreat and return to the hotel. Foresight could not suggest more complete precautions against accident than he took on common-sense principles. But, unhappily, one evening the Boer artillery carried on practice later than usual, aiming with fixed sights

steadily at the Royal Hotel, in the evident hope of hitting some staff officers who were supposed to hold their mess there. It was nearly dark when two shells came in rapid succession from the big gun near Lombard's Kop, and the second, passing clean through Dr. Stark's empty bedroom into the hall below, went out by an open door and hit the doctor, who was coming in at that moment. A special correspondent, Mr. M'Hugh, who happened to be standing near, rendered first-aid by the application of a tourniquet; and trained nurses came quickly to his assistance, but too late to save the kindly gentleman, who had been shot through both legs, and whose life-blood was ebbing fast, though he remained alive and conscious of everything that passed for an hour afterwards. The hand of fate seemed there, but whether it was more merciful to him or to those who, having escaped shot and shell, are now stricken by disease in an unhealthy camp, who shall say?

Incidents of this kind turn our thoughts to a serious complexion at times, and if a stranger could come suddenly into our midst in the moments of depression we should not perhaps strike him as a particularly cheerful community. Yet war even under these conditions has its amenities, and our mirthful moods, though chastened by events that thrust themselves upon us with unpleasant insistence, are not infrequent. For many welcome breaks in the monotony of daily life we are indebted to the

officers and men of regiments that will not allow themselves or their neighbours to get into the doldrums for lack of such sports and entertainments as ingenuity can improvise. In this respect the Natal Carbineers, Imperial Light Horse, and Gordon Highlanders have shown a praiseworthy zeal, being encamped near each other, and having so far an advantage over regiments like the Devon, Liverpool, Gloucester, Leicester, Rifle Brigade, Royal Irish Fusiliers, King's Royal Rifles, and Manchester, which since the first day of investment have been detached for the defence of important positions, where they can hardly venture to expose themselves in groups without a certainty of drawing the enemy's artillery fire upon them, and where the necessity for ceaseless watchfulness at night puts a severe strain on all ranks. Not that the Gordons and Irregular Horse lead a leisurely life, or have any especial immunity from shells. On the contrary, they take a full share of duties in many forms, and they have been rather singled out as marks for the enemy's guns to aim at; but they have not to rough it as a whole battalion on hillsides without tents day after day, as their outpost lines or patrols can be relieved from standing camps in the hollows, and in those camps the main bodies, at any rate, get a fair allowance of undisturbed sleep, for it is only by day that they are bombarded. When the fire is not too hot, Gordons, and Light Horse especially, have merry times at regimental sports or friendly contests.

In a despatch sent out by a Kaffir runner, who has never come back to claim the reward for success, I gave a description of sports in the Gordon camp, when they and the Imperial Light Horse had a football match in the presence of many spectators, Sir George White and several members of his staff being of the number. Such a gathering in full sight of Bulwaan was too tempting for the enemy's gunners to resist. People were so absorbed in the game that they did not at first notice a cloud of smoke from "Puffing Billy," and when they did understand what the Kaffir warning "Boss up" meant, there was only time for the spectators to scatter hurriedly among tents before a shell fell plump between the goals and burst there,—the spectators flying in all directions,—but fortunately without harm to anybody. The men coolly filled up the pit where the missile, that had so nearly "queered their pitch," fell, and then played their game out; but care was taken to prevent onlookers from getting into a dense crowd again, and mule races were substituted for football, as presenting a less favourable mark for the aim of Boer gunners. These, however, seemed to be quite satisfied for a time with having made one good shot. They ceased firing, and stood or sat on the battery parapets, where, with the aid of glasses, they could be clearly seen watching the sports through telescopes and binoculars with sympathetic interest. But that did not prevent them from turning their gun with malicious intent on the town after these camp sports

ended. It was nearly dark when two shots fell near the Royal Hotel, and the third went through it to find a victim in poor Dr. Stark.

The Gordons, for some reason or other, seem to have a curious fascination for our foes, who single this battalion out for special attentions, some of which could be dispensed with. In the form of frequent shells they are distinctly embarrassing, as it is impossible at present for the Highlanders to acknowledge such courtesies by an appropriate reply. If they are intended as invitations to closer acquaintance I am quite sure our kilted comrades will be happy to oblige any night by kind permission of the General commanding. The Boers, however, indulge at times in pleasantries that show no bitterness of feeling, but rather a desire to be playfully satirical in a way which is suggestive of the intellectual nimbleness of a humorous elephant. Their inquiries after Sir Redvers Buller have already been mentioned. As to the ostentatious friendliness of our enemies for British soldiers, with whom a temporary truce brings them in contact, some amusing stories are told. One day a field officer of Hussars was in command of cavalry on outpost, when a Boer travelling-cart, flying the white flag, came rapidly up to the examining picket, and its only occupant made a cool request that he should be allowed to enter our camp, in virtue of the Red Cross badge on his arm, as he wanted an ambulance sent out for some of our wounded, who had fallen into the enemy's hands.

The Boer emissary was detained at the outposts until his message could be sent to headquarters and an answer brought back. "As I must wait here an hour," said he blandly, "won't you dismount and take a seat beside me under the shade of the awning?" Military regulations having made no provision for a refusal in such cases, the Englishman accepted, and the two were presently carrying on an animated conversation about many subjects not connected with the siege of Ladysmith. Now, the major has a remarkably youthful appearance, and when he chooses to assume the devil-may-care manner of a light-hearted subaltern, it fits him easily. Moreover, his shoulder-chains bore no distinctive badge of rank. There was nothing, in fact, to show that he was anything more than a cavalry lieutenant, whom no sense of responsibility oppressed. So the Boer felt his way quickly to subjects in which one who serves under the Geneva Convention has no right to be interested. Answers were given glibly enough, and at the end of that hour, with profuse assurances of amicable consideration, he departed, probably laying the flattering unction to his soul that much valuable information had been unconsciously imparted to him. He did not know that the free-and-easy young cavalry soldier who talked with such apparent frankness had learned a staff officer's duties as aide-de-camp to one of our most astutely cautious Generals. This is the story as it was told to me at second hand, and if only well invented it is too good to be lost.

Still better is Major King's own narrative of adventures that befell him when, as the bearer of a flag of truce without credentials, he found himself practically a prisoner among the Boers. He had gone out to the Boer outposts to make inquiries about another staff affair—the bearer of a flag of truce whose prolonged absence was causing some uneasiness, as the message taken by him to General Schalk-Burger did not demand any answer. Major King had no intention of going inside the Boer lines, and therefore took with him no letter or written authority for his mission, but simply rode towards the enemy's piquets unarmed and carrying a white flag, to show that for once he was not playing the part of a combatant, though wearing a staff officer's undress uniform. When his purpose was explained to the Boers on duty, they suggested that he should accompany some of their number to the commandant's camp, and, without taking the precaution to blindfold him, they led the way thither, chatting pleasantly all the way about every topic except fighting. On reaching a group of tents, the exact position of which he for honourable reasons will not mention even to his own chief, Major King was confronted by a Boer leader, who was at first very wroth with the escort for bringing an English officer through the lines in that unceremonious way. When matters had been explained, however, the commandant, as he turned out to be, introduced himself, saying:

"My name is Viljoen. You have probably heard a great deal about me, if not much that is good. Some of your countrymen in the Transvaal thought me a very bad lot, and as they are now with the Imperial Light Horse in Ladysmith, I daresay there are many queer stories told about me; but I am not quite so bad as they make out. Your presence here without papers, however, is very awkward, and I have no alternative but to make you a prisoner."

"Oh, that's d—d nonsense," said Major King. "I had no wish to come here, but your men insisted on bringing me. My only object was to find out what had become of a brother-officer who should have got back to camp long before this. I give you the word of a soldier that I did not want to find out anything about your position, and whatever I may have seen, which is precious little, will be told to no one."

The commandant was in a difficulty, but agreed to send for one who is his senior in rank and submit the case to him. During the messenger's absence Major King was hospitably entertained, and his hosts, or captors, talked about sport, suggesting that some day might be set apart for an armistice, so that Boers and English might have a friendly race-meeting. The commandant, by way of showing that he does not bear resentment for the things that have been said about him, described his experiences after the battle of Elandslaagte, from which he was a fugitive, and said:

"I walked that night until I could go no farther, thinking that the Colonial volunteers were in pursuit. If I had known they were English cavalry I should have given myself up, for I was nearly done."

As pronounced by him, "Fiyune," his name does not sound familiar to English ears, and it was therefore not until some time afterwards that Major King knew he had been entertained by the notorious Ben Viljoen, who was first reported among the killed at Elandslaagte, then as wounded and a prisoner, but who in fact got away from the fight almost unscathed, and now holds a command in the Boer force outside Ladysmith. Interviews with a senior commandant, who was by no means complaisant, and finally with Schalk-Burger, followed. The latter, after raising many difficulties and dangling prospects of imprisonment in Pretoria before Major King, finally consented to release that officer on condition that he would not take any military advantage of what he had seen or heard in the Boer lines. That condition has been honourably kept, but the Major does not feel himself bound to make any secret of the fact that while the Boers kept him under detention they treated him "devilish well." This way of putting it may seem a little ambiguous, but those who know General Hunter's light-hearted A.D.C. will understand the sincerity of his tribute to the hospitality of Commandants Schalk-Burger and Ben Viljoen.

Another Boer, who may be credited with a desire to say pleasant things, was talking under a flag of truce with an English officer about the prospects on each side. "We admit," he said, "that the British soldiers are the best in the world, and your regimental officers the bravest, but—we rely on your generals."

Even on the battlefield, when men are apt to be carried away by the lust of fighting, many incidents have happened that touch the chords of sympathy. The Boers have curious notions about white flags and Geneva Crosses, but so far as our experience goes nobody can accuse them of inhumanity to a fallen or helpless foe, except in the matter of firing on hospitals when they think there are military reasons to justify them. They shelled the Town Hall of Ladysmith persistently while sick and wounded were lying there and the Red Cross flag waved above its clock-tower. In reply to a protest from Sir George White, Commandant Schalk-Burger defended his gunners on the plea that we had no right to a hospital in Ladysmith while there was a neutral camp at Intombi Spruit for their reception. The contention was, of course, preposterous, and based moreover on the insulting assumption that our General had been guilty of sheltering effective combatants behind an emblem which all civilised nations have agreed to respect. Possibly the enemy may seek to show that we are not above suspicion in such things, by reference to a skirmish in which one

of our batteries did open from a position directly in front of ambulance waggons. These were outspanned near a field hospital when the affair began, and as it was thought necessary to get the wounded out of possible danger quickly, they had to be removed some little distance in dhoolies. Meanwhile the Boers were getting guns on to a kopje where they might have enfiladed one of our most important lines of defence. To stop them in time a battery had to be brought into action, and the only ground from which it could have shelled the kopje, to frustrate the enemy's purpose of mounting a gun there, was just in front of the ambulance waggons. Care, however, had been taken in that case to lower the Red Cross flag, so that our artillery cannot be accused of using it as a "stalking horse," though each waggon bears the same symbol painted conspicuously on its canvas awning. These are matters about which some ill-feeling has been aroused, but they do not lessen our appreciation of acts by which individual Boers have shown magnanimity while smarting under losses that must have been bitterly humiliating to them.

When our cavalry reconnaissance was pushed forward after the successful night attack on Gun Hill, the Hussars got into a very tight place, from which they extricated themselves by a dash that cost many lives, and some wounded were left on the field with their dead comrades. Ambulances were sent out for them under a flag of truce. As one

Hussar was being carried on a stretcher, a young Boer jeered at him, using epithets that were so coarse and cowardly that they roused the ire of a bearded veteran who probably fought against our troops nineteen years ago. With one blow he felled the youngster, and thereby gave him an object-lesson in the treatment that is meet for those who abuse a helpless foe. To chivalry of a similar kind Captain Paley owed his life when wounded after the night attack on Surprise Hill, according to the story told by one who heard it while the wounded officer was being brought back to camp next day. In the confusion and darkness Captain Paley's men did not see him fall directly after he had given the order for them to charge. He was left there sorely wounded, and one of the many foreigners now fighting against us in the enemy's ranks levelled a rifle at him, but was stopped before he could pull the trigger by a blow from the butt-end of a rifle that sent him reeling. Again it was a grey-bearded veteran who had come so timely to the rescue of an Englishman. If many such stories are told we must either come to the conclusion that the older Boers do not entertain against us the hatred with which they are credited, or that there is one of their number who goes about the battlefield from fight to fight seeking opportunities to succour British soldiers in distress. At any rate, all this is simply history repeating itself. Mr. Carter, in his impartial narrative of the former Boer war, tells us :—

"Similar evidence was furnished after every encounter our troops had with the Dutch. It was the young men—some mere boys of fifteen—who displayed, with pardonable ignorance, bragging insolence. The men of maturer years, with very few exceptions, behaved like men, and in the hour of victory in many instances restrained the braggarts from committing cowardly acts. In this fight at the Nek, Private Venables of the 58th, who was one of the prisoners taken by the Boers, owed his life to Commandant De Klerck, who intervened at a moment when several Boers had their guns pointed at the wounded soldier."

It is not, however, very reassuring to find that but for such timely intervention wounded men might possibly be shot or ill-treated, and therefore our soldiers will not be restrained from risking their lives to rescue a fallen comrade merely by the announcement that "we are at war with a civilised foe, to whose care the wounded in battle may be confidently left." We may be thankful for the fact that saving life under fire is still regarded as an act worthy of the Victoria Cross "for valour."

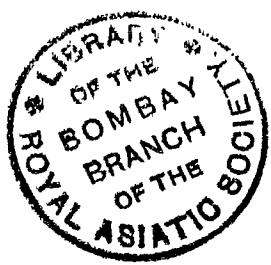
In other respects, we do not owe much gratitude to the Boers. If we were dependent upon them for anything that could help to make life in a bombarded town tolerable, Ladysmith's plight to-day would be pitiful. They have tried their hardest—though not successfully—to make every house in the place untenable between sunrise and sunset, doing

infinitely more damage to private property than to military defences; and they have thrown shells about some parts of the long open town with a persistence that would seem petty in its spitefulness if we could be sure that the shots strike near what they are aimed at. So long as the Boers do not violate any laws of civilised warfare nobody has a right to blame them for trying the methods that may seem most likely to bring about the fall of Ladysmith. They have, however, simply wrecked a few houses, disfigured pretty gardens, mutilated public buildings, destroyed private property, and disabled by death or wounds a small percentage of our troops, without producing the smallest effect on the material defences, or weakening the garrison's powers of endurance in any appreciable degree. Such a bombardment day after day for seven weeks would doubtless get on the nerves if we allowed ourselves to think about it too much; but happily the civilians—men and women—who resolved to "stick it out" here rather than accept from their country's enemies the questionable benefits of a comparatively peaceful existence under the white flag at Intombi Spruit have shown a fortitude and cheerfulness that win respect from every soldier. Shelters are provided for them and their children, but they do not always take advantage of these, even when a bugle or whistle from the look-out post warns them that a shell is coming. Ladies still go their daily round of shopping just as they did in the early days of bombardment, indeed

more regularly, and with a cool disregard of danger that brave men might envy. Though more than 5000 shells have been thrown within our defensive lines, and a vast number of these into the town itself, only one woman has been wounded so far, and not a single child hit. For all this we have every reason to be thankful.

When the sun goes down people who have taken shelter elsewhere during the day return to their homes, and have pleasant social gatherings, from which thoughts of Boer artillery are banished by innocent mirth and music. Walking along the lampless streets, at an hour when camps are silent, one is often attracted by the notes of fresh, young voices, where soft lights glow through open casements, or the singers sit under the vine-traceried verandah of a "stoup," accompanying the melody with guitar or banjo. Occasionally stentorian lungs roar unmelodious music-hall choruses that jar by contrast with sweeter strains, but sentiment prevails, and who can wonder if there are sometimes tears in the voices that sing "Swanee River" and "Home, Sweet Home," or if a listener's heart is deeply moved as he hears the words, "Mother come back from the Echoless Shore," sung amid such surroundings in the still nights of days that are hoarse with the booming of guns. Few of us, however, despise comic songs here when time and scene fit. We have them at frequent smoking-concerts that help to enliven a routine of duty that would be dull without these entertainments. There

are no regimental bands to cheer us, but the Natal Volunteers have improvised one in which tin whistles and tambourines make a fair substitute for fifes and drums. The pipes of the Gordon Highlanders we have always with us, too.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CHAPTER IX

A CHRISTMAS UNDER SIEGE

Husbanding supplies—Colonel Ward's fine work—Our Christmas market—A scanty show—Some startling prices—A word to cynics—The compounding of plum-puddings—The strict rules of temperance—Boer greetings "per shell"—A lady's narrow escape—Correspondents provide sport—"Ginger" and the mules—The sick and wounded—Some kindly gifts—Christmas tree for the children—Sir George White and the little ones—"When the war is over"—Some empty rumours—A fickle climate—Eight officers killed and wounded—More messages from Buller—Booming the old year out.

It needed perhaps all the music that could be mustered in the town to remind the beleaguered garrison and inhabitants that the festive season was upon them. It was inevitable that at such a time the thoughts of all should turn a little regretfully to other scenes. But it takes a great deal to depress the British soldier to the point at which he is willing to forego his Christmas; and on all hands, in spite of adverse fortune, preparations were made to keep the day in as fitting a manner as the restricted means allowed—with what success is described by Mr. Pearse in the following letter:—

Thanks to the perfect organisation which Colonel Ward, C.B., brings into all branches of the depart-

ment over which he is chief here, and the attention paid to innumerable details by his second in command, Colonel Stoneman, there has never been any danger of necessary supplies being exhausted, even if this place were invested for a much longer time than seems likely now, but these two officers seem to have more than absolute necessaries in reserve. When Colonel Ward was appointed Military Governor of Ladysmith his measures for preserving health in the town and camps surrounding it took a very comprehensive form. He not only made provision for ample water-supply, in place of that which the Boers had cut off, but his ideas of sanitary precaution embraced inquiry into sources of food-supply and kindred subjects. To the end that he might know whether wholesome meat and drink were being sold, it was obviously necessary that he should have reports as to the articles in which various proprietors of stores traded. Information on these points was collected with so much care that, when the pinch came, he knew exactly where to put his hand on provisions for the healthy and medical comforts for the sick and wounded. He had only to requisition a certain number of shops and hotels that were scheduled as having ample supplies of the things wanted, and the trick was done. Some tradesmen were glad enough to have their old stock taken over wholesale by the military authorities at a profitable price, but others, who foresaw chances of a richer harvest, were inclined to grumble at the arbitrary

exercise of power of officials whose acts they regarded as little better than confiscation, and, unfortunately, some of these managed to evade the first call, so that they were allowed to go on selling privately, and running up the prices to a fabulous extent.

This was a mistake. All should have been treated alike, so that none might complain that kissing goes by favour, even in the most immaculate and best regulated armies. As it was, the military commissariat secured much that would add to the comfort of soldiers, but for what was left civilians had to pay dearly. Some idea of the way in which this worked may be given by a quotation from the prices bid at our Christmas market on Saturday. We have no Covent Garden or Leadenhall here, but it was felt that some sort of show ought to be made at this festive season, and accordingly everything in the form of Christmas fare that could be got together was brought out for sale by auction. It did not amount to much. The whole barely sufficed to fill one long table, which was placed in a nook between the main street and a side alley, where fifty people or so might crowd together without attracting the notice of Bulwaan's gunners, who would delight in nothing so much as the chance of throwing a surprise shell into the midst of such a gathering.

The time for holding this auction had been fixed with a view to the enemy's ordinary practice of

closing hostilities about sunset each evening, but he does not allow this to become a hard and fast rule, nor does he recognise "close time" that may not be broken in upon at will, if sufficient temptation to shoot presents itself. So the sale was held, not only in a secluded corner, but in the brief half-light between sunset and night. Some civilians came as a matter of curiosity to look on, but the majority were soldiers, regular or irregular, on business intent, and they soon ran up with a rapidity that gave the good traders of Ladysmith a lesson in commercial possibilities when it was too late for them to profit by it to the full. Eggs sold readily at nine shillings a dozen, their freshness being taken on trust and no questions asked. Ducks that had certainly not been crammed with good food were considered cheap at half a guinea each, and nobody grumbled at having to give nine shillings and sixpence for a fowl of large bone but scanty flesh. Imported butter in tins fetched eight and sixpence a pound, jam three and sixpence a tin, peaches boiled that morning in syrup, and classified therefore as preserves, went freely for seven and sixpence a bottle, and condensed milk at five shillings a tin. But these prices were low compared with the five shillings given for three tiny cucumbers no longer than one's hand. The crowning bid of all, however, was thirty shillings for twenty-eight new potatoes, that weighed probably three or four pounds. The buyers were mostly mess-presidents of regiments, whose officers began

to crave for some change from the daily rations of tough commissariat beef and compressed vegetables; or troopers of the Imperial Light Horse, who will rough it with the best when necessity compels, but not so long as there are simple luxuries to be had for the money that is plentiful among them.

Cynics dining sumptuously in their clubs may jeer at the idea of campaigners attaching so much importance to creature comforts. Let them try a course of army rations for two months, and then say what price they would set against a fresh egg or a new potato. Two privates of the Gordon Highlanders stopped beside the auctioneer's stall as if meditating a bid for some fruit. They listened in wonderment as the prices went up by leaps and bounds. Then said one to the other, "Come awa, mon! We dinna want nae sour grapes." For them, however, and for others whose means did not run to Christmas market prices, there was consolation in store. Colonel Ward had taken care that there should be a reserve of raisins and other things necessary for the compounding of plum-puddings; and officers of the Army Service Corps were able to report for Sir George White's satisfaction that sufficient could be issued for every soldier in this force to have a full ration. The only thing wanting was suet, which trek oxen do not yield in abundance after eking out a precarious existence on the shortest of short commons; and half-fed commissariat sheep have not much superfluous

fat about them. What substitutes were found it boots not to inquire too curiously, seeing that Tommy did not trouble to ask so long as he got his Christmas pudding in some form. There was no rum for flavouring, as all liquors have to be carefully hoarded for possible emergencies. So for once the British soldier had to celebrate Christmas according to the rules of strict temperance. Yet he managed to have a fairly festive time for all that.

Boer guns sent us greeting in the shape of shells that did not explode. When dug up they were found to contain rough imitations of plum-pudding that had been partly cooked by the heat of explosion in gun barrels. On the case of each shell was engraved in bold capitals, "With the Compliments of the Season." This was the Boer gunner's idea of subtle irony, he being under the impression that everybody in Ladysmith must be then at starvation point. In all probability it did not occur to him that he was throwing into the town a number of curious trophies which collectors were eager to buy on the spot for five pounds each, with the certainty of being able to sell them again if they cared to at an enormous profit some day. After wasting some ammunition for the sake of this practical joke, our enemies began a bombardment in earnest. Most of this was directed at the defenceless town. One shell burst in a private house, wounding slightly the owner, Mrs. Kennedy, whose escape from fatal injuries seemed miraculous, for the room in which

she stood at that moment was completely wrecked, the windows blown out, and furniture reduced to a heap of shapeless ruin.

Shells notwithstanding, the troops had their Christmas sports following a substantial dinner of roast beef and plum-pudding. There were high jinks in the volunteer camps, where Imperial Light Horse, Natal Carbineers, and Border Mounted Rifles, representing the thews and sinews of Colonial manhood, vied with Regular regiments in strenuous tugs of war and other athletic exercises, preparatory to the tournament, which is fixed for New Year's Day —"weather and the enemy's guns permitting." Three special correspondents, whose waggons are outspanned to form a pleasant little camp in the slightly hollowed ridge of a central hill, where they cannot be seen from the Boer batteries, and are therefore comparatively safe except from stray shells, organised a series of novel sports for the benefit of their nearest neighbours—the Rifle Brigade transport. "South Africa," in the person of its genial representative, put up most of the prize-money, and together we arranged a succession of events, offering inducements enough to secure full entries for competitions that lasted from ten o'clock in the morning until near sunset, allowing sufficient intervals for the mid-day meal and other refreshments. We flatter ourselves that our gymkhana, in which races ridden on pack and transport mules furnished the liveliest incidents, would take a lot of beating—as

a humorous entertainment at any rate. In order to avoid drawing fire from "Puffing Billy" or "Silent Sue" of Bulwaan, the course had to be laid in a semicircle that passed the picketing line for mules. Up to that point they would gallop like thoroughbreds, then cut it to their customary feeding-places with a promptness that sent several good riders to ground as if they had been shot. There are several good jockeys in the Rifle Brigade transport, and among them one who spent many days in racing stables at home and abroad before he took it into his head to follow the fifes and drums of "Ninety-Five." But even the redoubtable "Ginger," with all his horseman's skill and powers of persuasion in French, Hindustani, and English, could not prevail over a mule's will. It was more by luck than good riding that anybody managed to get past the post without two or three falls by the way. But this only added to the fun of the thing, for Tommy when in sportive mood takes hard knocks with infinite good-humour. When at the finish successful and unsuccessful competitors assembled to cheer their hosts, the three correspondents had the gratification of feeling that for a few of the many besieged soldiers in Ladysmith they had helped to make Christmas merry.

You may be sure that sick and wounded at Intombi hospital were not forgotten in the midst of our wild festivities. For them the morning train was laden with fruit, flowers, and such delicacies as the

resources of this beleaguered town can still furnish. There are many unselfish people here who do not want to make money by selling things at market prices, or to keep for their own use the dainties that might be nectar to the lips of suffering soldiers. And there are officers also who have given of their abundance so freely that they will have to be dependent on similar generosity if the chances of war should number them among the sick or wounded. I must guard myself against being misunderstood. The hospital patients at Intombi Camp are not reduced to meagre fare yet, nor likely to be, but medical comforts are not all that a sick man craves for, and the simplest gifts sent from Ladysmith's store that day must have been like a ray of sunshine brightening the lot of some poor fellow with the assurance that, though far from home, he was still among friends who cared for him. Nor were the weakly and the children who still remain in this town forgotten. Colonel Dartnell, a soldier of wide experience, who commands the Field Force of Natal Police, and is beloved by every man serving under him; Major Karri Davis, of the Imperial Light Horse; Colonel Frank Rhodes, Lord Ava, and a few others got together the materials for a great Christmas tree, to which all the little ones between babyhood and their teens were invited. The Light Horse Major's long imprisonment with his brother officer Sampson in Pretoria, far from embittering him against humanity in general, has

only made him more sympathetic with the trials and sufferings of others; just as heavy fines and a death sentence seemed to bring out the most lovable characteristics of Colonel Rhodes. It was Karri Davis who bought up all the unbroken toys that were to be found in Ladysmith shops; and the ready hands of ladies, who are always interested in such work, decorated the Christmas trees or adorned the hall in which this gathering was to be held with gay devices and hopeful mottoes. There were four trees. Round their bases respectively ran the words, "Great Britain," "Australia," "Canada," and "South Africa," and above them all the folds of the Union Jack were festooned. Contributors sent bon-bons and crackers in such profusion that each tree bore a bewildering variety of fruit. To avoid confusion in distributing prizes, these were numbered to correspond with the tickets issued; and Santa Claus, who patronised the ceremony, in a costume of snowy swansdown, that shed flakes wherever he walked, was content to play his part in dumb show, while the children walked round after him to receive the toys that were plucked for them, with many jests, by Colonel Dartnell and his genial colleagues. Over two hundred children were there, and many of them so young that it seemed as if the one precluded from attendance on the score of extreme youthfulness must have been the siege baby, who was then only a few days old. Generals Sir George White and Sir Archibald Hunter, with their aides-de-camp and

many staff officers, came to take part in the interesting scene.

Looking at the little ones as they trooped through the hall, in their white finery, Sir George said he had no idea that so many children remained in Ladysmith, and perhaps at that moment his heart was heavy with a deeper sense of the responsibility thrust upon him. But fortunately we have been spared the worst horrors of a bombardment. Though Boer gunners have never hesitated, but rather preferred, to turn their fire on the open town, with a probability of hitting some house in which were women and children, none of the latter, and only two of the former, have been hit through the whole siege. Mrs. Kennedy, to whose narrow escape I have already referred, suffered so little bodily injury or nerve shock that she was present with her children at the Christmas tree entertainment, and took the congratulations of her friends quite coolly. After the children had gone home trees and trappings were dismantled, and the hall cleared for dancing, which the young people of Ladysmith and a few subalterns off duty kept up with much spirit until near midnight. In days to come we may look back to our Christmas under siege in Ladysmith, and think that after all we had not a very bad time. At this moment, however, there is probably nobody outside who envies our lot, or grudges us any enjoyment we may manage to get out of it. Soldiers, at any rate, deserve every chance of

relaxation that can be found for them. There are several regiments of this force that have been practically on outpost duty since the investment began, often exposed to rain-storms during the day, because they could not pitch even shelter tents without drawing the enemy's fire on them. When the honours for this campaign come to be distributed I hope the services of these regiments will not be ignored.

Some Boxing Day sports had to be postponed for a more convenient opportunity, because shells were falling too thick about the camp, and since then the Boer guns have been so busy that men find occupation enough in fatigue duties at strengthening defensive works without thinking about amusements. The bombardment that day began with the first flush of roseate sunrise—when our enemies brought some smokeless guns to bear on us from new positions—and went on steadily for hours until "Puffing Billy" of Bulwaan left off shelling in this direction, and turned to fire several shells eastward. Rumour, as usual, was equal to the occasion, circulating stories that Sir Charles Warren's patrols were known to be moving that way. These inventions are worth nothing unless the names of corps or their commanding officers can be given, so their originators always take care to give such realistic touches. They give you "the lie circumstantial" or none at all. Possibly there may have been in this firing more method than we imagine,

the idea being to mislead us by a pretended engagement with some force on the other side of Bulwaan. Another rational theory is that the gunners were simply expending a little ammunition in practice at range-finding for their guidance in future eventualities. Any story proved acceptable as a relief to the weariness of life in camp, that day when the thermometer registered 108° in the shade. What a climate Natal has! For fickleness it beats anything we have to grumble about in England. At night the temperature went down to 65°, and the brilliant summer weather broke up suddenly in a fierce thunderstorm. For a time every object roundabout would be blotted out by inky blackness, and for the next two or three minutes the lowering angry clouds would pulsate with dazzling light that leaped upward like life-blood from the throbbing heart of the storm. Each thundering peal was followed by a momentary lull, and then spasmodic gusts shook the air, as if Nature were drawing a deep breath for another effort. Before daybreak yesterday the storm had cleared, leaving a clouded sky, but no mists about the hilltops, to prevent a continuance of the bombardment.

Surprise Hill's howitzer surpassed previous performances by throwing three shells over Convent Ridge into the town, and the Bulwaan guns, having done with imaginary foes eastward, turned their attention to us once more. One of the earliest shells from that battery struck the mess tent of the

Devon Regiment, and burst among officers at breakfast with disastrous results. Captain Lafone, who had been wounded at Elandslaagte, was killed; Lieutenant Price-Dent so seriously injured that there is little hope of his recovery; six other subalterns wounded—one being hit by shrapnel bullets or splinters in four places—and the mess waiter struck down by a heavy splinter that embedded itself beneath the ribs in a cavity too deep for probing at present. There was a curiously spiteful touch in the bombardment all day, and at midnight we were roused by sounds of rapid rifle-firing that began from Bell's Spruit and the railway cutting against Observation Hill and ran along to Rifleman's Ridge on one flank, and Devonshire Hill on the other. It was all Boer firing, but no shots came into the line of defences, and our men did not reply by letting off so much as one rifle. A thunder-storm raged to the accompaniment of heavy rain for some time, and perhaps the enemy thought we might choose such a night for attacking them under cover of intense darkness.

The last few days of the closing year were, on the whole, quiet, though, as Mr. Pearse seems to have felt, important events were brewing. We make the following extracts from his notebook:—

December 28.—This morning there was just a pale glimmer of dawn when our large naval gun assumed the aggressive part, and sent six shells in rapid

succession on to Bulwaan battery and the hillside, where Boers were moving about. A little later stretcher parties could be seen collecting apparently wounded men, As "Puffing Billy" made no reply to this challenge, but remained silent all day, it is probable that many of the gunners were injured. "Silent Susan," otherwise "Bulwaan Sneak," however, fired several shots, and the bombardment was kept up from Rifleman's Ridge, Telegraph Hill, and a 12-pounder on Middle Hill, while Pom-Poms at two points barked frequently, but all this fuss and fury happily did no harm to anybody. At night a brilliant beam, like the tail of a comet, appeared in the southern sky. Presently the tail began to wag systematically, and experts were able to spell out the words of a cipher message. It was General Buller talking to us across fifteen miles of hills, and the conversation, all on one side, was kept up until lowering clouds shut out the light. We had no means of replying, but at eleven o'clock our guns fired two shots as a signal that the message had been seen and understood.

December 29.—Yesterday and to-day the bombardment has been vigorous in spite of heavy rain, and directed mainly on houses in town. Colonel Dartnell had a narrow escape on Friday, a shell bursting close to his tent in the Police Camp behind the Court-House. Next morning one came into and through my old room at the Royal, completing its ruin. To all this shooting the naval guns have

replied effectively at intervals. Ammunition for them is precious, and Captain Lambton's gunners take care not to waste it on chance shots, as the Boer artillerymen do. From five o'clock last evening until dawn this morning rain fell heavily. The river rose four feet in one hour at midnight, flooding out the 18th Hussars, who are bivouacked by its banks, and carrying away the bridge that had been built by the Imperial Light Horse. Many horses and mules were swept down-stream by the roaring torrent, and drowned before anybody could attempt to save them.

December 31.—The old year closes in a quiet that is probably deceptive. More Boers than we have seen for weeks past are gathered behind Bulwaan, many having returned from leave which Joubert is said to have granted them to visit their home, with a liberality that shows his confidence in our inactivity. It has not been so quiet all day. The Boers disregarded their customary Sabbath rule of refraining from hostilities unless provoked by some apparently menacing movement on our part. There was nothing of that kind to incense them this morning, but their gunners, unable to resist the temptation offered by herds of cattle on Manchester Hill (as Cæsar's Camp is sometimes called), sent one shell from "Silent Susan" on to that ridge. They missed their mark, however, and did not get another chance until the afternoon, when several "Sneakers" were aimed at the old camp, and one burst close to a

group of officers who were exercising themselves and their ponies for a polo match. This may have been meant as a rebuke to the Sabbath-breakers. Boer riflemen were engaged at that time in the more reprehensible pastime of sniping our outposts at long range, and they kept this up until near sunset, as if engaged in the most laudable duty; but we have long since learned that the Boer judges his own conduct by one standard and ours by another.

To-day the sun shone brilliantly, bringing back tropical heat, in contrast to the cold that always accompanies violent thunder-storms in Natal.

And so Christmas-tide was past, and the New Year broke upon the beleaguered garrison. So great is the influence of times and seasons that we may well believe that even in Ladysmith the first day of 1900 brought a brighter ray of hope. But hope must yet for long be deferred, and the daily round of tasks grow wearisome by repetition—the daily dole of eked-out rations, the daily tale of bursting shells, were for many weeks, with one day's startling break, to be the sole preoccupation of the defenders. The enemy, even on this first day of January, were not willing to leave the garrison in doubt as to their presence, although, despite the possible touch of sarcasm, there was a grim sort of friendliness in their reminder. It again took the form of blind shells—this time fired from the Free State batteries—inscribed "Compliments of the Season." The sarcasm (writes Mr. Pearse)

seems the more pointed because we hear that the Boers believe us to be starving and unable to hold out much longer. We should, at any rate, appreciate

the good wishes more if they were sent in another form. Shells, even without fuses or powder-charges, are not quite harmless; and though these have done no damage so far, there is always a chance that they may hit somebody when fired into the heart of a town where people still carry on their customary occupations in spite of bombardment.

Whatever change favourable to their hopes was believed in by the Boers, there was none in the spirit with which soldiers and civilians alike in the invested township faced the duties placed upon them. Writing on New Year's Day Mr. Pearse has a timely and a generous word for the humbler heroes of the siege:—

We have among us one little saddler for whose services there is so much demand that he has steadily stitched away for hours together every working day since the siege began, heedless of shells. There are tailors, too, who have done their best to keep officers and civilians clothed, not even quitting their benches when shrapnels burst near them, and I know of at least one poor seamstress who, by working night and day, has earned enough to buy something more than bare rations even at famine prices. Cynics do not look for heroes or heroines among such as these. They toil for gain, that is all. But they have stuck to their notion of duty in the midst of danger, and no soldier could have done more. Not all the shells fired into town on New Year's Day were harmless, however. One from Bulwaan burst near Captain Vallentin's

house, which has been a favourite since Colonel Rhodes took up his quarters there, and at last one hit just over the front door. It smashed the drawing-room wall, passed thence to the kitchen, and mortally wounded a soldier servant, whose last words to his master were, "I hope you've had your breakfast, sir!"

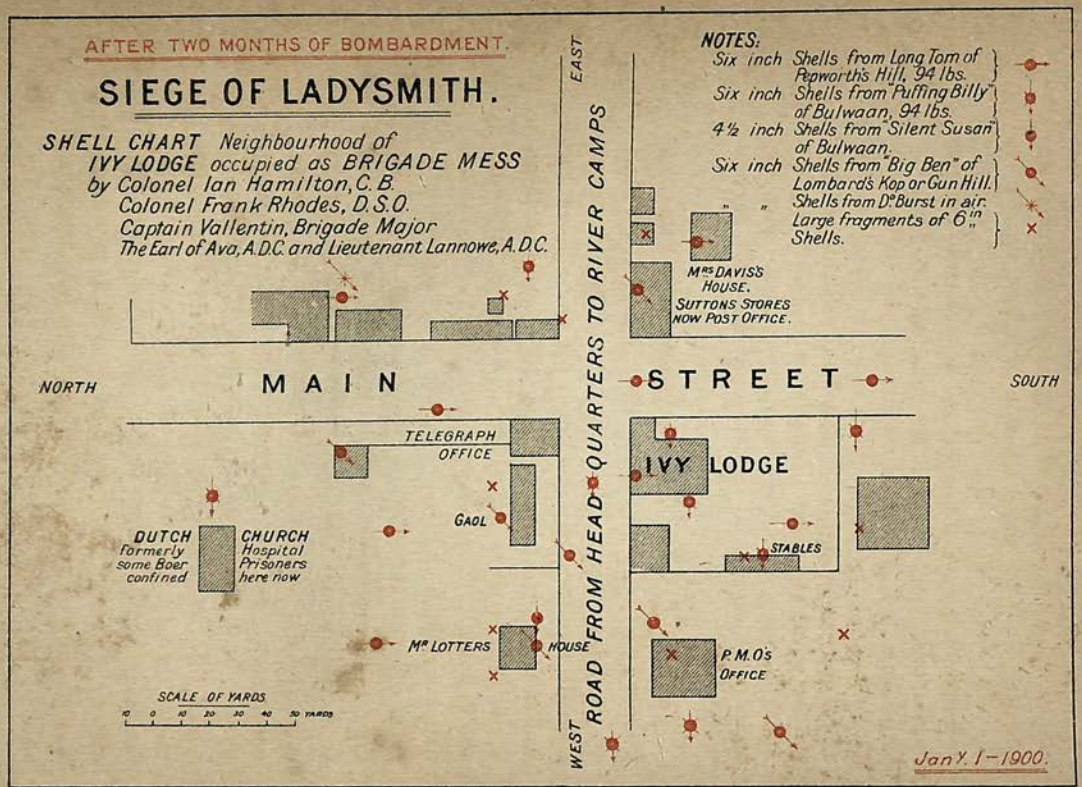
Up to this time the subject of food supply, though it had long seriously occupied the attention of the authorities, had not gravely added to the anxieties of the siege. Under the date of 1st January Mr. Pearse has the following entry:—

Colonel Ward tells me that rations are holding out well. Neither soldiers nor civilians, who number altogether over 20,000, have suffered privations yet, and, thanks to Colonel Stoneman's admirable system of distribution, something more than beef, bread, and groceries can still be issued to those who are too weak to be nourished by rough campaigning fare.

Forage for horses was, however, getting very scarce, and the poor beasts suffered greatly.

Four hundred men, including natives, are sent out every day to cut grass on the hillsides that are least exposed to Boer rifle fire, and they manage to bring in about 32,000 lbs. daily, but this does not go far among all the cavalry horses, transport animals, and cattle. Many must be left to pick up their own food by grazing under guard. The old

troop-horses, however, break away from their allotted pasturages when feeding-time comes. Perhaps their quick ears catch the familiar bugle call to stables sounding afar off. At all events, neither knee-halters nor other devices are of any avail. They get back to the old lines somehow at feeding-time, and it is pitiful to see them standing patiently, in a row, waiting for the corn or chaff that is not for them, trying by a soft whinny to coax a little out of the hands of soldiers who pass them, or sidling up to an old stable chum who is better fed because better fit for work, in the hope of getting a share of his forage for the sake of auld lang syne. Those who know how the cavalry soldier loves a horse that has carried him well will not need to be told how hard Tommy found it to resist the appeal of a dumb comrade in distress; and who shall blame him if he shortened by just a handful or so the allowance for horses that are rationed on a special scale rather than turn a half-starved outcast empty away? But sentiment is a mistake when kindness can do no more than prolong misery. There is no horse sickness yet in the epidemic form. They simply pine for want of nourishment until, too weak even to nibble the grass about them, they drop and die. Some day we may have a use for them before things come to that extremity, but at present the difficulty is to dispose of their carcases. Sanitary considerations forbid that they shall be buried in town or near camp. The enemy shells working parties, who begin to dig


AFTER TWO MONTHS OF BOMBARDMENT.
SIEGE OF LADYSMITH.
SHELL CHART Neighbourhood of
IVY LODGE occupied as BRIGADE MESS
by Colonel Ian Hamilton, C.B.
Colonel Frank Rhodes, D.S.O.
Captain Vallentin, Brigade Major
The Earl of Ava, A.D.C. and Lieutenant Lannowe, A.D.C.
NOTES:
Six inch Shells from Long Tom of Pepworth's Hill, 94 lbs.
Six inch Shells from "Puffing Billy" of Bulwaan, 94 lbs.
4½ inch Shells from "Silent Susan" of Bulwaan.
Six inch Shells from "Big Ben" of Lombard's Kop or Gun Hill.
" " Shells from Dº Burst in air.
Large fragments of 6" Shells.
EAST
WEST
ROAD FROM HEAD QUARTERS TO RIVER CAMPS
NORTH
MAIN
STREET
SOUTH
Mrs DAVIS'S HOUSE.
SUTTONS STORES NOW POST OFFICE.
TELEGRAPH OFFICE
GAOL
DUTCH formerly some Boer confined
CHURCH Hospital Prisoners here now
IVY LODGE
STABLES
Mr LOTTERS HOUSE
P.M.O's OFFICE
SCALE OF YARDS
10 0 10 20 30 40 50 YARDS
Jan.Y. 1–1900.

[Face p. 175.

pits on the open plain, and so an incinerating furnace has been built for the cremation of horses.

In the early days of the year the Boer batteries became much more active. We shall see that they were preparing for a climax, which, however, by the splendid bravery and determination of the garrison, was to be turned into one of disaster for the enemy rather than for the defenders. We are now within three days of the hottest ordeal Sir George White and his gallant army had to pass through. Happenings in the short interval are thus described in Mr. Pearse's notes:—

January 3.—For two days the Boer fire from Bulwaan has been directed mainly at the Town Hall or buildings near it, with occasional diversions towards the Intelligence Offices on one side, or the Indian Ordnance Laager on the other. Within these limits of deviation are the busiest parts of Ladysmith, bakeries for the supply of all who are invested, depots at which civilians assemble to draw their daily rations beside the Market Square, where lank-sided dogs snarl over refuse, and such stores as have still something to sell that has not been requisitioned for military uses. The Royal Hotel seems to be a mark once more. Several shells have come near hitting it to-day, and not twenty yards from the room in which I am making these notes a shrapnel has just burst through the wall of a stable. One horse standing there seems to be badly wounded, but curiously enough hardly shows any signs of terror, though the explosion close to him must have sounded

terrific, and he was half blinded by dust mingled with fumes of melinite. The fact that Boers use high explosives for bursting charges has been questioned, but this shrapnel, and others I have seen burst at close quarters, undoubtedly contained melinite or some similar villainous compound, to which our own lyddite is near akin. A little later two ladies were driving down the main street when a shell burst just in front of their trap. The pony swerved as if to bolt, but his driver pulled him up with a steady hand and soothed him without a tremor in her voice. At the next corner, fully exposed to Bulwaan's battery, these ladies stopped, waiting to watch the effect of another shot.

It must not be thought that our own guns, though seldom mentioned, are idle all this while. They do not waste ammunition, for a very good reason, but wait their opportunity for effective reply to the enemy's batteries, and when a naval 12-pounder or the "Lady Anne" comes into action the Boer fire is apt to be hurried and wildly inaccurate if it does not cease for a time. The Boers have however mounted a new gun near Pepworth's, which sends "sneakers" into town and about Mount Hill with irritating persistency, and its smokeless powder makes a flash so small that the exact position cannot be located.

January 5.—Days in succession pass unbroken by any incidents dissimilar to the routine which in the very constancy of danger becomes monotonous. Yesterday and to-day are so much alike that one

hardly remembers which was which unless some personal adventure or a friend's narrow escape makes a nick in the calendar. Yesterday for instance, one of several shells bursting about the same spot shattered the water tanks behind a chemist's shop, and its splinters came in curious curves over the housetops, one grazing an officer of the Imperial Light Horse, to whom I was at that moment talking. The next shell was into the police camp, where it burst with destructive force, completely wrecking Colonel Dartnell's tent with all its contents, but injuring nobody. Had that genial and most popular officer followed the almost invariable practice of his everyday life, there would have been an end of the man to whom more than to anybody else we owe the timely retirement from Dundee. He it was who told General Yule, "You must go to-night or you will not be able to go at all," and whose advice, being acted upon, brought back several thousand men to strengthen the garrison of Ladysmith just before its investment. The loss of such a man would have been irreparable, for he knows more than any other officer in this country about Boers and their methods of fighting, and he has every thread of information at command if he were allowed to use native scouts in his own way. He would have made the best possible chief of an Intelligence Staff, but unfortunately military etiquette or jealousy bars his employment in that capacity. If his advice is asked for he gives it readily as at Dundee, and though he has no authority

to act in the way that would be most congenial to his fearless and active nature, he is as ready as ever to render a service when wanted. Some of us know too how much civilians have been encouraged in their endurance of a long siege by Colonel Dartnell's cheery example. Nothing disheartens him. He is always the same whether the day's news be good or bad, and perhaps his unostentatious services will be adequately recognised in the end. If they had been taken advantage of in the beginning there would be fewer blunders to regret.

To-day Colonel Stoneman had more than one narrow escape. Two shells burst within splinter range of the office in which he and his assistants have worked steadily at supply details since the bombardment began. A third passed through the roof over that office after a ricochet, and then, without bursting, rolled to the ground in front of a stoup where several Army Service officers were sitting. That shell will be cherished after extraction of its fuse and melinite charge. Fire from other Boer guns proved more disastrous. Surprise Hill's howitzer threw one shell to the little encampment behind Range Point, where it killed one man and wounded four of the unfortunate Royal Irish Fusiliers.

But the time seems now ripe for larger events. On the following day the Boers made their supreme attempt upon the defences of the town. Their best and their bravest were pitted against the siege-worn British soldier;

but though they gained all the advantage of a night surprise, though their fierce energy placed them at this point and that several times within an inch of victory, they were hurled back by a foeman whose determination was greater than their own, and whose courage and spirit of self-sacrifice rose superior.

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT ASSAULT

Why the Boers attacked—Interesting versions—A general surprise—Joubert's promise—Boer tactics reconsidered—Erroneous estimates—Under cover of night—A bare-footed advance—The Manchesters surprised—The fight on Waggon Hill—In praise of the Imperial Light Horse—A glorious band—The big guns speak—Lord Ava falls—Gordons and Rifles to the rescue—A perilous position—The death of a hero—A momentary panic—Man to man—A gallant enemy—Burghers who fell fighting—The storming of Cæsar's Camp—Shadowy forms in the darkness—An officer captured—"Maak Vecht!"—Abdy's guns in play—"Well done, gunners!"—Taking water to the wounded—Dick-Cunyngham struck down—Some anxious moments—The Devons charge home—A day well won.

WHEN Mr. Pearse spoke of the comparative calm which marked the closing days of 1899 as deceptive, he was right, and events promptly proved him so. On 6th January the Boers, as has been said, made a most determined attempt to bring the siege of Ladysmith to an end by storming the British defences. Why the enemy should have allowed so long an interval to elapse since their half-hearted effort of 9th November, is difficult to imagine. Dingaan's Day (16th December) was originally fixed for the attack, but Schalk-Burger was diverted from his purpose by the attempt made by Sir Redvers Buller to force the passage of the Tugela. The projected onslaught on the

besieged town having once been abandoned, it was generally believed that the Boers would be too intent on watching the movements of the relief column to trouble about attacking Ladysmith in force. According to one report an imperative order from President Kruger precipitated matters, while another story is to the effect that a bogus despatch purporting to be from Sir George White to Sir Redvers Buller, brought about the sudden change in the enemy's tactics. This despatch, so the story runs, asked that relief might be sent at once as the ammunition was exhausted, and it was impossible for the garrison to hold out in the event of the town being attacked. The native runner, to whom the document was entrusted, was instructed to proceed in the direction of the Boer lines, and so faithfully complied with his orders that both runner and despatch fell into the hands of the enemy. If the Boers were led to attack by any such ruse they were completely disillusioned as to the capabilities of Sir George White's forces. Be it said to their credit that, whatever their hopes of an easy victory, they quitted themselves like men when they realised their tremendous mistake. The long fierce struggle is vividly described in the following letter written two days after:—

Saturday's stubborn fight was a surprise in more senses than one. Nobody here had credited the Boers with a determination to attack, unless chance should give them overwhelming superiority in all respects, and for that chance they have waited so supinely that it seemed probable the game of long bowls with heavy artillery, varied by "sniping" from behind rocks a mile off, would continue to be played day after day in the hope of starving us into

subjection, before Sir Redvers Buller could bring up his relieving force. Everybody knew that issue to be well-nigh impossible, because our resources are far from starvation point yet, and it is inconceivable that eight or ten thousand British soldiers could be hemmed in by three times their number of Boers, and compelled to yield without a desperate fight in the last extremity. We were fully aware that if ever an opening offered for the Boers to creep up within shorter range, under cover, and without being seen, they would be prompt to take advantage of it, in expectation of bringing off another Majuba, and that is a danger to which our extenuated defensive lines necessarily expose us, but we trusted with justice, as events have proved, to the steadiness and discipline of well-trained troops, to hold the Boers in check wherever they might gain any temporary advantage, and drive them back at the bayonet's point. That they would even push an attack to storming point few if any among us believed, for the simple reason that rifles are of no use against cold steel when combatants come to close quarters. The Boers know that well enough. Their only hope in attack therefore rests on the chance of being able by stealth to seize an advantageous position whence they may bring a deadly rifle fire to bear on the defenders, whom they hope by this means to throw into panic.

That was the plan they tried on Saturday, being urged to it, as we have since learned, by peremptory

orders and fair promises from Joubert, who is said to have watched the fight from a distance. That, however, seems improbable, if Sir Redvers Buller was at the same time threatening a movement against the Tugela Heights, though it is certain that Joubert attached great importance to this attack on Ladysmith, because he had written a letter ordering De Villiers to capture Bester's Ridge, at all costs, with his commando of Free State Boers, and promising that those who succeeded in winning that position should be released from further service. This anxiety to get hold of a range which includes Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill, and commands Ladysmith at a range of 5000 yards, can be easily understood, but the urgency demanding any sacrifice of life, provided that end were attained, suggests many possibilities, and gives to Saturday's fight exceptional significance as a probable turning-point in the Natal Campaign, which has hitherto gone in favour of our foes, notwithstanding the victories we have gained over them in isolated actions. Dundee and Elandslaagte, like Lord Methuen's fights on the Modder River, added lustre to our army, by showing what British soldiers can do in assaulting positions against the terrific fire from modern magazine rifles, but it cannot be said that we have profited by them while our enemies are able to keep us here cut off from all communications except by heliograph or search-light signals, and have yet force enough to interpose a formidable line

of resistance between Ladysmith and Sir Redvers Buller's column.

There cannot be many Boers in any position surrounding this place, but their mobility gives them the power of concentrating quickly at any point that might be threatened, and this for all practical purposes increases their numbers threefold. As Colonel F. Rhodes put it in one of his quaintly appropriate phrases, "We are a victorious army besieged by an inferior enemy." But there are Boers in twice our own strength near at hand, if, not actually all in the investing lines. The Tugela Heights are scarcely twelve miles off as the crow flies, and this distance might be covered by a Boer commando in less than two hours, so that a thousand men or more moving from one of our enemy's columns to another, could be brought into a fight in time to turn the tide against either Ladysmith or its relieving force as occasion might prompt. For attacking a particular point this mobility would give enormous advantages if the Boers only knew how to make full use of them, and carried arms on which they could rely for hand-to-hand fighting, in the critical moment of pushing an attack home.

As it is they trust to tactics that have stood them well in previous campaigns against British soldiers and natives, their object being to gain some commanding position, whence, without being seen, they may pour a deadly fire on their astonished foes,

and thus cause a panic retreat that might be turned into a disorderly rout by a sudden rush of reinforcing Boers or a terrific storm of bullets from several quarters at once. Reasoning from experience they hope to make history repeat itself in another Majuba Hill. One would have thought that the fights at Elandslaagte and Dundee would dispel delusions of that kind based on the assumption that Tommy Atkins will not stand up against rifle bullets at short range from Boers whom he cannot see if they but steal upon him and open fire where he least expects to find them.

Probably there were erroneous estimates on both sides, but at any rate it is certain that our foes were confident of being able to win by massed surprise, and their effort was made with an adroitness not less astonishing than the audacity of its conception. After this it will be ridiculous for anybody to contend that the Boers are not brave fighters, though they lack the daring by which alone fights like that of Saturday can be decided. Their tactics have changed little since the old days, and it remains true now as then that they are an offensive but not an attacking force. Having gained by stealth the positions that were supposed to command our outpost defences on Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill, they acted from that moment as if on the defensive, trusting for victory not to any forward movement of their own but to the belief that our men would give way, and might then be rolled back in panic

upon Ladysmith by thousands of mounted Boers who awaited that turn of events to make their meditated dash. Such undoubtedly was the plan conceived by Free State and Transvaal commanders at the Krygsraad when Joubert, Prinsloo, Schalk-Burger, Viljoen, and other leaders met together in council some days ago. The manner of its execution may be conjectured by the light of subsequent events.

The attack began before daybreak with a determined attempt to capture the whole range of Bester's Ridge, which is divided officially into Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill, forming the southern chain of our defences, and held by the outposts of Colonel Ian Hamilton's Brigade. Seventy of the Imperial Light Horse held Waggon Hill with a small body of bluejackets and a few Engineers having charge of the 4.7 naval gun, which they had brought up overnight for mounting in that position, but it still remained on a bullock waggon. Next to them were several companies of the King's Royal Rifles under Colonel Gore-Browne, while the Manchester Regiment held Cæsar's Camp with pickets pushed forward to the southern crest and eastern shoulder. Nearly the whole length of ridge hence to Waggon Hill is a rough plateau, strong but presenting little cover from artillery fire or the rifles of any foe bold enough to scale the heights under cover of darkness. It was scarcely entrenched at all, having only a few sangars dotted about

as rallying-points. The Boer movements were marked by a searchlight from Bulwaan, which played for hours in a curious way across Intombi Hospital Camp to the posts occupied by our men, intensifying the obscurity of all-surrounding blackness.

All we know absolutely is that long before dawn Free Staters were in possession of the western end of Bester's Ridge, where Waggon Hill dips steeply down from the curiously tree-fringed shoulder in bold bluffs to a lower neck, and thence on one side to the valley in which Bester's Farm lies amid trees, and on the other to broad veldt that is dominated by Blaauwbank (or Rifleman's Ridge), and enfiladed by Telegraph Hill—both Boer positions having guns of long range mounted on them; and at the same time Transvaalers, mostly Heidelberg men, had gained a footing on the eastern end of the same ridge where boulders in Titanic masses, matted together by roots of mimosa trees, rise cliff-like from the plain where Klip River, emerging from thorny thickets, bends northward to loop miles of fertile meadow-land before flowing back into the narrow gorge past Intombi Spruit Camp. How the Boers got there one can only imagine, for neither the Imperial Light Horse pickets on Waggon Hill, nor the Manchesters holding the very verge of that cliff which we call Cæsar's Camp and the Kaffirs Intombi, nor the mixed force of volunteers and police watching the scrub lower down, saw any form

or heard a movement during the night. It was intensely dark for two or three hours, but in that still air a steenbok's light leap from rock to rock would have struck sharply on listening ears. Those on picket duty aver that not a Boer could have shown himself or passed through the mimosa scrub without being challenged. Yet four or five hundred of them got to the jutting crest of Cæsar's Camp somehow, and to reach it they must either have crossed open ground or climbed with silent caution up the boulder-roughened steeps.

An explanation may perhaps be found in the fact that a Boer takes off his boots or vel-schoon when there is noiseless stalking to be done. Going over the battlefield afterwards I noticed that where dead Boers were lying thickest about the salient angle of that eastern space, all were bare-footed. Boots and even rubber-soled canvas shoes had been taken off for the climb, and these lay in pairs beside the bodies, just as they had been placed when the fight began. And the spots on which these Boers lay seemed to indicate that they must have scaled the steep just where a sentry among the rocks on top would have found most difficulty in seeing anything as he peered over jutting edges into the darkness below. At any rate the Manchester picket was surprised before dawn, as I shall describe presently, though it should have been put on the alert by rifle firing an hour earlier away on Waggon

Hill, where the fight began between two and three o'clock. Then, however, it seemed little more than the sniping between outposts, to which custom has made all of us somewhat inattentive, and nobody thought for a moment that a picket of Imperial Light Horse had been practically cut off before the Boers fired a shot or our own men had given an alarm.

Waggon Hill was at that moment the key of a very critical situation, and had the Light Horse been seized by panic, or given way an inch, the Boers might possibly have brought enormous numbers up to that commanding crest and enfiladed the rear of Cæsar's Camp. We know now that thousands of Free Staters were waiting in the kloofs between Mounted Infantry Hill and Middle Hill, not two miles distant, for the opportunity which, they had no doubt, would be opened up to them by the success of five or six hundred tough veterans who had volunteered to win that position or die in the attempt. They had, however, to reckon with men whose gallantry was proved at Elandslaagte and the night attack on Gun Hill—men who are endowed with the rare quality which Napoleon the Great called "two o'clock in the morning courage." One has to praise the Imperial Light Horse so often, that reiteration may sound like flattery. But they deserve every distinction that can be given to them for having by superb steadiness, against great odds, saved the force on Bester's Ridge from a very serious

calamity, if not from actual disaster. They must share the credit to some extent, however, with two small bodies of men already mentioned, who happened to be on Waggon Hill neither for fighting nor watch-keeping—the few bluejackets of H.M.S. *Powerful* in charge of the big gun which had been brought up that night for mounting there, and the handful of Royal Engineers under Lieutenants Digby-Jones and Dennis, preparing the necessary epaulements for that weapon. When firing began, the gun being still on its waggon, all that could be done was to outspan its team of oxen. Then bluejackets and sappers, seizing each his rifle, took their places behind slight earthworks, prepared to fight it out manfully. The only tribute they need ask for is that their roll of dead and wounded may be borne in memory. Out of thirty all told, the Royal Engineers lost two officers killed and fifteen men wounded. Of the few sailors, one was killed and one wounded. This record seems hard to beat; but the Imperial Light Horse could point to heaps of dead and maimed in proof of the dauntless stand they made, for the living continued to fight where their gallant comrades fell, scorning to quit an inch of ground to the Boers, though they knew by the rifle fire flashing round them in the darkness that they were hopelessly outnumbered from the first. Their brigadier speaks of them as men with no nerves at all. When one was hit, another stepped quietly up to his place and went on shooting as if at target-practice, though he

had no more cover than a small stone to lie behind ; and this happened not once but a score of times, the officers taking an equal share in the fight with their men, who speak with pride of the gallantry shown by Captains de Rothe and Codrington, Lieutenants Webb, Pakeman, Adams, Campbell, and Richardson, and the active veteran Major Doveton, who cheered his men on after he had received two bullet wounds, one of which shattered his fore-arm and shoulder.

By that time the sun was rising above Bulwaan in a halo of orange, crimson, and purple, and men could count the grim faces of their enemies. Ladysmith was aroused at dawn by the rattle of incessant rifle fire rolling along Bester's Ridge from end to end. Up to that time no big guns had spoken on either side, and people came out of their houses slowly, in sulky humour at having their rest disturbed before the conventional hour for shelling to begin. While they listened to the continuous crackling as of damp sticks in a huge bonfire, few among them realised that the sounds indicated anything more serious than a Boer demonstration which would fizzle out quickly, and even when bullets began to fall in the town itself, or went whistling away overhead, the only comment made was that Mauser rifles must have a marvellous range if they could send bullets so far beyond the ridge aimed at.

Bulwaan's 6-inch Creusot opened fire as the sun rose behind it in a splendour of orange and crimson

clouds. The white smoke changed to wreaths of blue and deep purple against that glowing sky, while people waited to hear the gurgling scream of a shell. It did not come the way they expected, but burst above the dark crest of Cæsar's Camp. Then the watchers, relieved because the big guns had found other occupation than battering down houses, went back to bed or to their morning baths, little thinking that the fate of Ladysmith was at the moment dependent on men who lay among rocks, or behind grass tussocks, looking through rifle sights at such short range that they could almost see the colour of each other's eyes.

Colonel Hamilton, who had ridden out with his staff, and accompanied by Colonel F. Rhodes, to the highest knoll of Bester's Ridge, grasped the situation quickly and ordered up reinforcements. The Boers who had crept round the crest of the eastern steep, which I have called by its Kaffir name Intombi, were even then almost up to the camp that Colonel Hamilton had quitted half an hour earlier, but screened from the Manchester battalion's fire by a swell of the ground in front. Their further progress, however, was stayed by a counter attack from Border Mounted Rifles and Natal Volunteers whom Colonel Royston brought up to reinforce the Frontier Police under Major Clark, who had been holding that point with dogged determination since dawn. The brigadier, seeing that for a time no headway was being made by the enemy against

Cæsar's Camp, turned his attention towards Waggon Hill and sent Lord Ava forward to reconnoitre from the spot where Colonel Edwardes, with the main body of Imperial Light Horse, reduced to less than half its original strength by losses in former actions, was making a gallant effort to relieve the remnants of two squadrons from their perilous plight on Waggon Hill. Lord Ava watched its issue from the fighting line beside men with whom he had scaled the rough heights of Elandslaagte and the stiffer steeps of Gun Hill. As he raised himself upon a small boulder to look through glasses at the enemy, who were pouring in a hail of bullets from a distance of little more than 150 yards, a bullet struck him in the forehead, and there he lay, apparently lifeless, with every sense dead to the din of war about him. A few minutes later Colonel Frank Rhodes heard that a staff-officer had been hit. He came at once to the conclusion that it was the young friend who had been his companion daily since they sailed from England early in September. As he went forward to make sure, Lieutenant Lannowe, of the 4th Dragoon Guards, aide-de-camp to Colonel Hamilton, joined him, and these two, passing unscathed across the shot-torn slopes, found Lord Ava lying sorely wounded, but still alive, where Boer bullets were falling thickest about the Imperial Light Horse. They carried him to a place of less danger, and there Colonel Rhodes bandaged the wound, while a skilful surgeon's aid was being sum-

moned. By that time Majors Julian, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, and Davis, medical officer of the Imperial Light Horse, had their hands full, having rendered aid to many wounded men under the heaviest fire, utterly regardless of danger to themselves. The first operation, without which recovery would have been hopeless, was, however, performed there, while Mauser bullets whistled through the air, and Lord Ava, still unconscious, was borne from the field.

The few bluejackets, Gordons, Imperial Light Horse, and Engineers, under Lieutenant Digby-Jones, R.E., were still holding their ground manfully on the extreme westerly crest of Waggon Hill. The Boers were within point-blank range of them on two sides, while beyond the crest and down into Bester's Valley hundreds of others were waiting for the first sign of panic among our men to rush the position, but held in check by a company of the 60th Rifles and a few Light Horse occupying a small sangar on that side. The ridge, however, was being shelled by the enemy's guns from Middle Hill and Blaauwbank with such accuracy that many of our men were wounded by that fire, but not a Boer was hit, though the fighting lines were less than 100 yards apart. The 21st Battery Field Artillery, out in comparatively open ground beyond Range Post, swept with shrapnel the slopes and kloofs of Mounted Infantry Hill on one side, and Major Goulburn's battery, the 42nd, searched

the reverse slope of that knoll, smiting the head of a movement by which our foes tried to strengthen their attack. The Natal artillery had done similar service at an earlier stage against another body, and though under heavy rifle fire they still stuck to their guns manfully. Our naval 12-pounder mounted near this battery, but having double the range, played upon Middle Hill, trying by rapid and accurate fire to silence the big Creusot gun there, or baffle its aim.

This was the favourable opportunity seized by Colonel Hamilton for sending forward Major Miller-Wallnutt with one company of Gordons to reinforce the little group of bluejackets, Light Horse, Engineers, and Highlanders who were fighting so desperately hard to beat the Boers back. A little later Major Campbell reached Waggon Hill with four companies of the "Second Sixtieth," but their fire failed to dislodge the Boers, and the Gordons, under Miller-Wallnutt, were being sorely pressed, the Boers having a number of picked shots among the rocks on two sides whence they could bring a deadly fire to bear on the flanks of any force that might attempt to cross the open ground between. General Hamilton, however, seeing that risks must be taken, or the Gordons would be in perilous plight, sent two companies of Rifles forward in succession, but smitten in front by artillery fire from Middle Hill and Blaauwbank, while their flanks were raked by rifle bullets, they halted and took such cover

as could be found among small stones. A company being then called upon to rush the open space, Lieutenant Todd asked for permission to try first with a small body, and this being granted he led a mere handful of ready volunteers forward. The gallant young officer, however, had not gone many yards before he was shot dead, and the men fell back disheartened by the loss of one whom they would have followed anywhere, because they recognised in him the qualities of a born leader.

After that there were moments of humiliation when it seemed as if the possibility of holding Waggon Hill hung upon a mere chance. Once surprised by finding Boers within fifty yards, the whole forward line of Rifles and Highlanders gave way, retiring over the crest with a precipitancy that threatened to sweep back supports and all in a general confusion. But it was no more than a momentary panic, such as the best troops in the world may be subject to, and our men were quick to rally when they heard themselves called upon for another effort, and saw officers springing up the hill again towards that shot-fretted crest where several Engineers and bluejackets, with the Imperial Light Horse, still clung as if they had looked on Medusa's head, and become part of the rocks among which they lay, only that their forefingers were playing about the triggers, ready in a moment to give back shot for shot to the Boers. And when deeds of heroism

were being performed by Major Miller-Wallnutt, Lieutenant Digby-Jones, R.E., Gunner Sims of the Royal Navy, and Lieutenant Fitzgerald, 11th Hussars, who met their enemies face to face, the irregular troopers were not slow to take their part in fighting at close quarters. Trooper Albrecht, of the Imperial Light Horse, especially distinguished himself by shooting two of the Boers who were at that moment within a few yards of Digby-Jones with rifles levelled, and the young Engineer lieutenant, whose repeated acts of bravery might have merited the Victoria Cross, accounted for the other before he in turn was mortally wounded. Many tough old Free State Boers, who took all the brunt of fighting on this hill, behaved with the greatest intrepidity, winning admiration from foes who were yet eager to try a death-grip with them.

Here Hendrick Truiter fought as he did at Majuba in the forefront, and got off scot-free, though he presents a target many cubits broad; gigantic John Wessels of Van Reenan's; Commandants De Jaagers and Van Wyck, both killed; Wepenaar, who seemed to exercise authority above them all; and Japic de Villiers, Commandant of the Wetzies Hoek district, a man among men in his disregard of danger. When he fell dead, after making his way close up to our sangar and shooting Major Miller-Wallnutt, the Orange Free State lost one of its foremost citizens and bravest fighters. If the supports swarming thickly in Bester's Valley and the kloofs

behind Mounted Infantry Hill had come on with anything like the determination shown by the intrepid 500 who first seized Waggon Hill, there must have been many anxious moments for our General. As it was we had regained and still held the position, but without driving the Boers from their hiding-places within fifty yards of the crest.

But now it is time that we should turn our attention to a post three miles eastward, where an equally stubborn fight had been waged about Intombi Spur, and the fringes of a plateau, 800 yards wide, in front of the Manchester Battalion sangars on Cæsar's camp. There the pickets had been surprised, just about the time of relief, half an hour before dawn. There are differences of opinion, and some acrimonious discussions as to the means by which 500 Boers of the Heidelberg Commando, under Greyling, had succeeded in getting to a position which commanded much of that plateau before anybody had the slightest suspicion that enemies were near. At the outset I suggested an explanation which seems to be strengthened by every fact that I can gather. They came barefooted up the cliff-like face of Intombi Spur on its southern side, and crept round near its crest until they had command of the whole shoulder, practically cutting off the Manchester sentries from their pickets, but taking care to raise no premature alarm. Their rule apparently was to wait for the sound of firing

on Waggon Hill, whereby our attention might be diverted that way, and then to begin their own attack on a weakened flank.

This is nearly what happened, except that the Manchesters were put on the alert by signs of an attack about Waggon Hill more serious than any preceding it, and made preparations for strengthening their own outpost line. But it was then too late. The Boers were upon them, ready to open fire from behind rocks. As Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe was coming forward to examine the sentries, shadowy forms sprang out of the darkness and surrounded him. Then one who was in the uniform of a Border Mounted Rifleman called to the picket, "We are the Town Guard! surrender!" The sergeant, however, was not to be caught in that trap, but replied, "We surrender to nobody," and then ordered his men to fire. In a moment the air was torn by bullets from all sides, and the picket fell back fighting towards its own supports, not knowing then that the young officer had been left a prisoner in the enemy's hands. He was well treated by his captors, except that they kept him under fire from his own men so long as a forward position could be maintained, and when that became too hot they forced him to creep back with them to the cover of other rocks. He did not want much forcing, being glad enough to wriggle across the intervening space, where bullets fell unpleasantly thick, as fast as possible. There he lay close, but kept his eyes open, and saw something that may

furnish a key to the success of Transvaal Boers in scaling a difficult height that must have been quite strange to them.

Prominent in one group was a young man whom Hunt-Grubbe thought he recognised. For a long time the face puzzled him, but at last he remembered having seen a counterfeit presentment of it, or one very similar, in a photographic group of the Bester family. A Bester would know every rock and cranny of that hill with a familiarity which would make light or darkness indifferent to him. Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe made mental notes also of Boer tactics, by which they gave a great impression of numbers. A group would gather at one point and keep up rapid firing for some time, then double under cover to some rocks thirty yards off, and discharge their rifles there, but always taking care not to throw any shots away.

In spite of these dodges and good shooting, however, the Boers could make no headway against the Manchesters, who were by this time extended across the stony plateau under fire from Boer guns posted among trees on the far side of Bester's Valley. Neither side in fact could move either to advance or retire without exposing itself on open ground. Therefore they stayed blazing away at each other until the grey dawn gave place to swift sunrise. Then the Boers, who had a heliograph with them behind Intombi Spur, flashed to Bulwaan the signal "Maak Vecht," and our friend "Puffing Billy"—

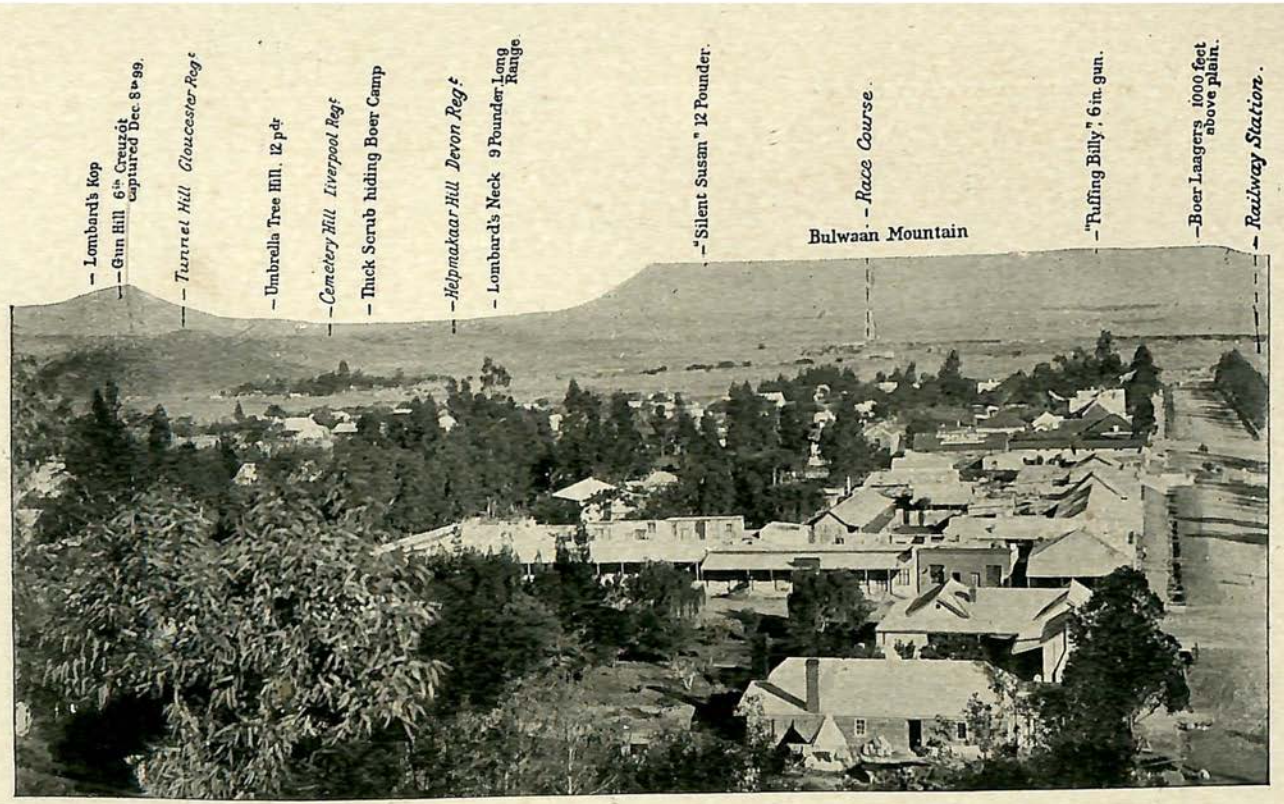
as the big 6-inch Creusot is called — promptly made fight in a way that was astonishing in a weapon whose grooves must be worn nearly smooth by frequent firing. He threw shell after shell with vicious rapidity and remarkable accuracy on to the plateau of Cæsar's Camp, but the shells fortunately did not fall among our men or burst well.

Just as Colonel Metcalfe arrived at Cæsar's Camp, with four companies of the Rifle Brigade to reinforce and prolong our fighting line, the Boer gunners turned their attention to another point, where, in the low ground among trees by Klip River, Major Abdy was bringing the 53rd Field Battery into action. This proved to be the turning-point of the fight on the eastern spur of Bester's Ridge.

Those six guns began throwing time-shrapnel with beautiful precision just where Boers were thickest. Not a shell seemed to be misplaced, so far as one could judge, and successive bursts and showers of shrapnel seemed to wither the immense thickets near Intombi's crest. "Puffing Billy" turned with an angry growl on Abdy's battery, and this was followed by many shells fired so rapidly that one began to think the gun must split under that strain. It went on firing, however, and shell after shell dropped close to our battery when it was unlimbered on an open space among mimosa trees. At last a shell burst under one of the guns, shrouding

it and the gunners in a cloud of mingled smoke and mud. Everybody watched anxiously to see who was hit or what had happened. The gun, they thought, must surely be disabled, but just as they were saying so there came a flash out from that cloud. The artillerymen had coolly taken aim while splinters were flying round them or hitting comrades, and we saw the shell, aimed under those conditions, burst exactly in the right place. It was a splendid example of nerve and steadiness under difficulties, and some spectators, at least, cheered it with cries of "Well done, gunners." So the 53rd Battery remained in action, doing splendid service by shelling the Boers on Intombi Spruit and beating back all attempts of Boer supports to scale the height that way. "Puffing Billy" went on firing from Bulwaan all this while, and is said to have got off over 120 rounds during the fight, but its shooting became very erratic and totally ineffective, while our guns were doing great execution.

It was from smaller Boer guns and Mauser rifles that the four companies of the Rifle Brigade suffered heavily in their attempt to drive the enemy from Cæsar's Camp plateau into Bester's Valley. One party was smitten heavily while moving forward in a gallant advance to get within charging distance. The shattered remnant took cover behind a small ridge of stones, beyond which there was a little open ground, where Lieutenant Hall and another wounded officer lay. Repeated attempts made to bring in


Lombard's Kop
Gun Hill 6in Creusot captured Dec. 8th 99.
Tunnel Hill Gloucester Regt
Umbrella Tree Hill. 12 pdr
Cemetery Hill Liverpool Regt
Thick Scrub hiding Boer Camp
Helpmakaar Hill Devon Regt
Lombard's Neck 9 Pounder Long Range
"Silent Susan" 12 Pounder.
Race Course.
Bulwaan Mountain
"Puffing Billy", 6 in. gun.
Boer Laagers 1000 feet above plain.
Railway Station.

THE BRITISH POSITION AT LADYSMITH, LOOKING EASTWARD

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these officers failed, because directly a man lifted himself above the stones he became the target for twenty Boer rifles. The colour-sergeant of Mr. Hall's company, however, crawled across that ground, to and fro, three times in as many hours, taking water to the wounded officers, who lay there under scorching sunshine, unable to move because even an uplifted hand was enough to draw the Boer fire on helpless wounded. Lieutenant Hall, whose arm was bleeding badly, turned over, apparently to bandage it, and another bullet struck him. Such was the fate of many brave fellows that day, whose stricken state should have appealed to the mercy of their enemies, but the Boers, unable to advance, and afraid to retreat so long as daylight lasted, were seemingly so suspicious of all movements that they saw in every wounded man a possible foe lurking there for his chance to get a shot at them. The same excuse, however, cannot be pleaded for one Free State burgher, who, lying down behind a maimed trooper of the Light Horse, kept up a fire to which our own men could not reply without fear of hitting their unlucky comrade.

After the Rifle Brigade had got into action, Colonel Dick-Cunyngham advanced with three companies of Gordon Highlanders from their camp in the plain to take the Boers on Intombi spur in flank. He had scarcely ridden two hundred yards when he fell mortally wounded by a stray bullet, and the Gordons marched on, leaving behind them

the intrepid leader whom every man would have followed cheerfully into the thickest fight. They gained the crest, and Captain Carnegie's company sprang eagerly forward to charge in among the Boers who held Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe prisoner. Him they recovered after close conflict, in which Captain Carnegie was wounded and Colour-Sergeant Price had three bullet-holes in him, but not before he sent a bayonet-thrust into the forehead of one Boer with the full force of his strong arm. But the Gordons could do no more then than lie down among the rocks they had gained and take part in pot-shooting at the enemy, who dared not budge.

Up to nearly four o'clock the position about Cæsar's Camp did not change, but on Waggon Hill there had been some alternations and anxious movements, while the Boers took positions only to be driven from them again. Then suddenly a great storm of thunder, hail, and rain swept over the hills, shrouding them in gloom, amid which the rifle fire broke out with greater fury than ever across Bester's Valley and the ground that had been stubbornly fought for so long. This sounded like an attack in force by fresh bodies of Boers who had made their way round from Bulwaan under cover of the hospital camp at Intombi Spruit. But they never came within a thousand yards of our position, and though their rifle fire at that range galled sorely, it was nothing more than a demonstration made in hope of

enabling their comrades on the heights to extricate themselves. Interest then turned again to Waggon Hill, where, when the storm was raging most fiercely, part of our line fell back in error, but the Brigadier and his officers, going forward until within revolver range of the enemy, restored confidence at that point.

Then three companies of the Devon Regiment marching from their post at Tunnel Hill, a distance of four miles or more, ascended Waggon Hill, led by Colonel Park, to whom Brigadier-General Hamilton gave but one laconic order. Wanting no more than the word to go, the Devons shook themselves into loose column and swarmed forward for their first rush across the zone of Boer fire. Having gained a little cover they lay there a while, and began shooting steadily with slow, deliberate aim, even adopting quaint subterfuges to draw shots from the Boers before pulling trigger themselves. Then in the same loose but unwavering formation they dashed forward in another rush, the sergeants calling upon their comrades to remember that they were Devons, and every company cheering as it ran towards the enemy, whose fire began to get a bit wild. Another halt for firing in the same steady way, and then rising with unbroken front, though their company leaders had all been hit, the Devons straightened themselves for a charge. With bayonets bristling they sprang to the crest, and their cheers rang loud across the hills. A hail of bullets made gaps in their ranks, but they

closed up and pressed forward, eagerly following their colonel. The Boers, unable to withstand any longer the sight of that fine front sweeping like fate upon them, fired a few hundred shots and fled down hill, followed by shots from the victorious Devons, who in a few minutes more had cleared the position of every Boer. That was the end of the fight, and though some enemies still clung to Intombi's crest waiting for darkness, their fire soon slackened, and the hard-fought battle ended in a complete defeat of the enemy at all points.

This brilliant victory, demonstrating to the Boers the vast difference between firing from cover on British assailants and attempts to storm positions held in force by our troops, cost the army at Ladysmith 420 men in killed and wounded. The large proportion slain on the spot was remarkable, and was due, no doubt, to the close fighting. Fourteen officers were killed and 33 wounded, while the non-commissioned officers and men killed numbered 167, and the wounded 284. The killed included, besides Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, Major Mackworth of the 2nd Queen's; Lieutenant Hall, Rifle Brigade; Major Miller-Wallnutt, Gordon Highlanders; Lieutenant Digby-Jones and Lieutenant Dennis of the Royal Engineers, all of whom met death heroically; Captains Lafone and Field, who were shot down as they charged at the head of their regiment; and many gallant volunteers serving in the ranks of the Imperial Light Horse. One company of the Gordons at the close of the battle was commanded by a lance-corporal, who was the senior officer unwounded. The Imperial Light Horse was commanded by a junior captain, and could

only muster about 100 men fit for duty out of nearly 500. As to the Boer losses, it is difficult to arrive at the truth. The Boer has to be badly beaten before he will acknowledge having suffered a reverse, and even in such cases every endeavour is made to hide the real facts of the case, and the acknowledgment is tardily and reluctantly offered. As supplementing his description of the memorable struggle, we take the following extracts from Mr. Pearse's diary:—

January 7.—I rode to-day over the battlefield, where dead Boers still lay unclaimed, but bearing on them cards that left no doubt about their identity. I learn that one of that brave little band, the Imperial Light Horse, wounded early in the fight, was tended gently by a Boer parson, who bound up his wounds and brought him water under a terrific fire. Struck by these acts of humanity and devotion to a high sense of duty, I made inquiries as to the Dutch parson's name. It was Mr. Kestel, pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church at Harrismith, a Boer only by adoption, a Devonshire man by birth and descent.

There was to-day a solemn service of thanksgiving in the English Church. A *Te Deum* was impressively sung,—Sir George White and his Staff, at the Archdeacon's invitation, standing at the altar rails,—and was followed by "God Save the Queen."

January 8.—Sir Redvers Buller heliographed,

congratulating Sir George White on the gallant defence of Ladysmith by this force, giving especial praise to the Devons for their behaviour, but making no mention of the Imperial Light Horse. An unfortunate omission.

CHAPTER XI

WATCHING FOR BULLER

Sir Redvers Buller's second attempt—A message from the Queen—Last sad farewells—Burial of Steevens and Lord Ava—At dead of night—Relief army north of the Tugela—Water difficulties surmised—A look in at Bulwaan—Spion Kop from afar—What the watchers saw—The Boers trekking—Buller withdraws—The "key" thrown away—Good-bye to luxuries—Precautions against disease—"Chevril"—The damming of the Klip—Horseflesh unabashed—One touch of pathos—Vague memories of home—Sweet music from the south—Buller tries again—Disillusionment—The last pipe of tobacco.

WHATEVER may have been the precise cost to the Boers of their bold attempt to rush the British defences on 6th January, it was certainly heavy enough to prevent its being renewed. From this time forward they settled themselves resignedly to wait until disease and starvation in the town should have done for them what their best and bravest had failed to do, man against man. And, indeed, disease following upon many long weeks of privation, of nights and days passed in the trenches under drenching rain, or the fierce rays of the African sun, began now to make havoc among the troops. Many a brave fellow, who had fought and won at Dundee or at Elandslaagte, who with fierce courage had endured in the foremost line in

the struggle at Bester's Ridge, now fell a victim to enteric fever or dysentery in the camp at Intombi. The lists of the sick and the mortality returns grew daily more formidable, rations soon had to be reduced, and all within the town, patient as had been their endurance, now began to look eagerly towards the relief that Sir Redvers Buller had promised in a month. As the time approached at which his second attempt to force the Tugela might be expected, hope revived. The relieving column, it was known, had been reinforced, and it seemed impossible that the enemy could once again bar its progress.

During the fierce fighting at Ladysmith there were times when Sir George White had grave fears that he would not be longer able to hold the defences against the enemy. The fortunes of the day, as the hours lengthened, were reflected in a series of telegrams which were flashed through by him to Sir Redvers Buller in his camp south of the Tugela. One of these brief heliograms reported that the defenders were "hard pressed," and in the afternoon, somewhat tardily as it seems, General Buller made a demonstration with all his available force towards the enemy's trenches. The object was to hold the Boers to their positions on the river, and to prevent the commandos attacking Ladysmith from being reinforced. As far as could be ascertained the enemy, however, were in full strength on the north side of the river, and after ineffectual efforts had been made to draw their fire the British force returned to camp. Within four days of this movement, Sir Redvers Buller advanced westward from Chieveley to make his second attempt to cross the Tugela and to relieve the town; and it is with the hopes inspired there by the news and with the tense anxiety with which every indication of advance or retreat on the distant hills was

watched by the beleaguered garrison, that Mr. Pearse's notes at this time in great measure deal.

January 11.—The bombardment has gone on vigorously for several days, and the Boers are busy on new works, probably with the idea of "bluffing" us into the belief that they mean to mount new guns, while in reality they are sending reinforcements southward to intercept General Buller. The reception yesterday of a message from the Queen thanking the troops here for their gallant defence aroused much enthusiasm. Lord Ava's death to-day causes profound regret in every regiment of Hamilton's Brigade and other camps, where his soldierly qualities and manly bearing made him a favourite with men and officers alike. Conspicuous for pluck among the bravest, he met death—where he had faced it in nearly every action since joining this force—with the fighting line. Of all who fell dead or mortally wounded in the heroic defence of Bester's Ridge, none will be more sincerely mourned than he. The civilians of Ladysmith join with the troops in expressions of respectful sympathy to Lord Dufferin and his family. To-night Lord Ava's body was buried in the little cemetery, a scene impressive in its simple solemnity. Brigadier-General Hamilton with his staff; Colonel Rhodes; Major King, A.D.C., representing the Headquarters Staff, with Sir George White's personal aide-de-camp; several officers of the Imperial Light Horse, among whom Lord Ava was

wounded; Captain Tilney of Lord Ava's old regiment; officers of the 5th Lancers, Gordon Highlanders, and Royal Artillery; several prominent townsmen, and five war correspondents stood beside the grave.

January 15.—Early this morning sixty shots from heavy guns were heard far off to the southward, giving us hope that General Buller had begun his promised advance for our relief. A few hours later I received a heliograph message from my eldest son, whom I supposed to be still in England, saying that he was with the South African Light Horse on probation for a lieutenancy. To-night there was another sorrowful gathering of correspondents in the cemetery, round the grave of our brilliant colleague, G. W. Steevens, who died this afternoon from a sudden relapse, when most of us hoped that he was on the way to recovery. Bulwaan searchlight, shining on us like a Cyclops' eye, followed the sad procession along miles of winding road to the cemetery, then left us in darkness beside the grave where our comrade was buried at midnight. He had been tenderly nursed throughout his long illness by Mr. Maud of the *Graphic*, who was chief mourner. He died in the house of Mr. Fortescue Carter, the historian of the previous Boer War.

January 18.—Kaffir runners report that General Lyttelton's division crossed the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift yesterday, and Sir Charles Warren's at Trichard's Drift to-day. We also hear of Lord Dundonald being near Acton Homes with a force

of Irregular Horse, some of whom wear sakkabulu feathers in their hats and carry "assegais." Possibly these are Lancers, but we cannot identify them. These stories may be true, for we hear heavy firing in the south-west at frequent intervals. The Intelligence Department expects an attack on one of our outposts to-night. Therefore we may go to bed and sleep in peace.

January 22.—Since Friday Sir Redvers Buller's guns have been pounding away for several hours of every day, beginning sometimes at dawn or carrying on far into the night. The throbbing vibrations of heavy artillery afar off seemed to fill the air all through Sunday, and we have seen shells bursting along the heights of Intaba Mnyama or Black Mountain, not much more than twelve miles in a straight line from Ladysmith. If our troops are attacking positions successively where there is no more water than can be brought to them from the Tugela they must be having a hard time, for the shade temperature at midday rises to 104°, and we know by experience what that means in the full blaze of sunshine on bare kopjes where the smooth boulders feel scorchingly hot to the touch. I watch the distant cannonade with a keen personal interest, for when there is fighting along the Tugela the South African Light Horse are surely in it.

Before daybreak this morning Colonel Knox, in command of Mounted Infantry, Carabiniers, Border Mounted Rifles, and a detachment of Colonel

Dartnell's Frontier Field Force went out to make a reconnaissance round one shoulder of Bulwaan. They got up through the wooded neck, had a look into the Boer position but saw not an enemy, and got back without having a shot fired at them until they showed in the plain again. Then ping! ping! came the Mauser bullets, and a "Pom-Pom" opened on them. Colonel Knox gave an order for his men to form loose order and gallop, and thus they got out of danger with not a man hit.

January 24.—All day long I have watched from Observation Buller's batteries shelling the whole range of Intaba Mnyama from the peaked "paps" or "sisters," past the Kloof north-west of them, and along the more commanding Hog's Back. The Boers call part of this range Spion Kop, and that name has been adopted by our Intelligence Staff as presenting less difficulties of orthography than the Zulu designation. So Spion Kop it must be henceforth. From a laager behind one peak I saw an ambulance cart with its Red Cross flag go up to the crest, which seemed a dangerous place for it, especially as a piece of light artillery opened beside the cart a moment later. I could see needles of light flashing out like electric sparks, only redder, but could hear no report. Nothing but a "Pom-Pom" could have made those quivering flashes, yet how it got there with an ambulance cart beside it I must leave the Boers to explain. The shelling of heights with Lyddite and shrapnel went on hour after hour,

and towards evening some thought they heard a faint sound as of rifle volleys. The Boers came hurrying down in groups from Spion Kop's crest, their waggons were trekking from laagers across the plain towards Van Reenan's, and men could be seen rounding up cattle as if for a general rearward movement. To us watching it seemed as if the Boers were beaten and knew it.

January 25. — The Boer trek continued for several hours this morning and well on into the afternoon, when it slackened. Then we saw some horsemen turn back to make for the cleft ridge of Doorn Kloof, where one of the big Creusots had opened fire, Buller's naval guns or howitzers replying with Lyddite shells. The roar of our field-guns has died away instead of drawing nearer, and we look in vain for any sign of British cavalry on the broad plain, where they should be by now if Sir Redvers Buller's infantry attack had succeeded.

January 26. — The Boers are back in their former laagers. There is no sound of fighting this side of the Tugela, only a few shells falling on Spion Kop, where Boer tents can be seen once more whitening the steep. We need no heliograph signal to tell us the meaning of all this. For us there is to be another sickening period of hope deferred; but we try to hide our dejection, and persuade the anxious townsfolk that it is only a necessary pause while General Buller brings up his big guns and transport.

January 28.—It is now no longer possible to conceal the fact that the fight on Spion Kop ended in another reverse for General Buller, though from our side it seemed as if he had the enemy beaten and demoralised. It is now published in orders that he captured the heights with part of one brigade which, however, retired after General Woodgate was wounded, when the Boers retook it. From Kaffir runners we hear another version which makes out that our troops were complete masters of the situation if there had been any one in command at that moment, with a soldier's genius, prompt to take advantage of the enemy's discomfiture. Had reinforcements been sent up in time Spion Kop need never have been abandoned, and Buller might have kept the key to Ladysmith which was then in his hands. Not another position between him and us remained for the Boers to make a stand on. He would then have outflanked and made untenable the entrenched heights facing Colenso. But perhaps he was anxious about his own line of communications. We only know that he has gone back, and the work accomplished at much sacrifice of life must be done over again from some other point.

January 30.—In spite of all we know, there are still persistent rumours rosy-hued but all equally improbable. According to these Kimberley has been relieved, and Lord Roberts is marching on Bloemfontein. Sir Redvers Buller has retaken Spion Kop. He has gained a victory at some other

point, but where or when nobody knows. Four hundred Boers are surrounded south of the Tugela with no chance of escape. A similar rumour reached us weeks ago. Those four hundred Boers must be getting short of food by this time. And yet another story makes out that numbers of the enemy attempting to fall upon Buller's supply column at Skiet's Drift were completely annihilated. The *Standard and Diggers' News* could hardly beat this for imaginative ingenuity. It does not reassure us. On the contrary a general feeling of depression seems to have set in, caused perhaps by the ennervating weather. A deluge of rain has drenched the land, from which mephitic vapours rise to clog our spirits. The knowledge that rations are running short may also have some effect. We have not felt the strain severely yet. There is no reduction in the issue of meat or bread, but luxuries drop out of the list one by one, and the quantities of tea, sugar, coffee, and similar things diminish ominously. Vegetables were exhausted long ago, and a daily ration of vinegar has been ordered for every man, whose officer must see that he gets it, as a precaution against scurvy.

February 1.—It has come at last. Horseflesh is to be served out for food, instead of being buried or cremated. We do not take it in the solid form yet, or at least not consciously, but Colonel Ward has set up a factory, with Lieutenant M'Nalty as managing director, for the conversion of horseflesh

into extract of meat under the inviting name of Chevril. This is intended for use in hospitals, where nourishment in that form is sorely needed, since Bovril and Liebig are not to be had. It is also ordered that a pint of soup made from this Chevril shall be issued daily to each man. I have tasted the soup and found it excellent, prejudice notwithstanding. We have no news from General Buller beyond a heliogram, warning us that a German engineer is coming with a plan in his pocket for the construction of some wonderful dam which is to hold back the waters of the Klip River and flood us out of Ladysmith.

February 3.—Horseflesh was placed frankly on the bill of fare to-day as a ration for troops and civilians alike, but many of the latter refused to take it. Hunger will probably make them less squeamish, but one cannot help sympathising with the weakly, who are already suffering from want of proper nourishment, and for whom there is no alternative. Market prices have long since gone beyond the reach of ordinary purses.

February 4.—One pathetic incident touched me nearly this morning, as a forerunner of many that may come soon. I found sitting on a doorstep, apparently too weak to move, a young fellow of the Imperial Light Horse—scarcely more than a boy—his stalwart form shrunken by illness. He was toying with a spray of wild jasmine, as if its perfume brought back vague memories of home. I learned

that he had been wounded at Elandslaagte and again on Waggon Hill. Then came Intombi and malaria. He had only been discharged from hospital that morning. His appetite was not quite equal to the horseflesh test, so he had gone without food. I took him to my room and gave him such things as a scanty store could furnish, with the last dram of whisky for a stimulant, and I never felt more thankful than at that moment for the health and strength that give an appetite robust enough for any fare.

February 5.—Just now one could not be wakened by a more welcome sound than the boom of Buller's guns. It stirred the hazy stillness at dawn this morning like sweet music. It grew louder and apparently nearer as the morning advanced, until in imagination one could mark the positions of individual batteries pounding away opposite Colenso and Skiet's drift. At last the roar died away in sullen growls, giving us the hope that a position had been gained.

February 6.—Again at daybreak we hear the guns of our relieving force at work in a vigorous cannonade away to the south-west, where Skiet's Drift lies. They quicken at times to twenty shots a minute, the field batteries chiming in faintly between the rounds of heavier artillery. From Observation Hill we can see the enemy's Creusot on a notched ridge by Doorn Kloof replying. Soon after seven o'clock a lyddite shell bursts there. Its red glare

is followed by flame that does not come from lyddite. Above this darts a black dense cloud speckled with solid fragments that shoot into the air like bombs. Before we have time to think that a magazine has been blown up a double report, merging into a low rumble, reaches our ears. Something has happened to the Boer battery, and the big gun there remains silent. Buller's artillery continues firing, more slowly but steadily, at the rate of eight shots a minute, and rifle fire can be heard rolling nearer all the afternoon. Boers are reported to be inspanning their teams and collecting cattle on the plains. The distance is dulled by mists, and the Drakensberg peaks are only dimly visible, but there are clouds of dust winding that way, and we know that the Boer waggons are trekking on the off-chance that a general retirement may be forced upon them. Is this hundredth day of siege to be the last, or shall we wake to-morrow to hear that the Boer laagers are back again, and the relieving force once more south of the Tugela?

February 7.—Sir Redvers Buller evidently finds that the new key of the road to Ladysmith fits no better than the old, and we begin to doubt whether he will be able to force the lock yet. Skiet's Drift is a difficult way, leading through a bushy country scarred with dongas and commanded by successive ridges, of which the Boers, with their great mobility and rapidity of concentration, know how to make the most. They still hold Monger's Hill, and their big

gun has opened again from the notched ridge by Doorn Kloof. Buller's guns are hammering at these positions, but apparently with little effect, for to every salvo from them the big Creusot makes reply. Nor is there any sign now of a Boer movement towards the rear. On the contrary, they have a new camp, possibly of hospital tents, where Long Valley merges into Doorn Kloof, and almost within range of our naval guns if we had them mounted on Waggon Hill.

While the fight rages near Tugela heights we are left in comparative peace here. "Puffing Billy" has not opened to-day, and his twin brother of Telegraph Hill has been silent many days. Probably he was taken away to reinforce the artillery now opposing General Buller's advance. If relief does not come soon we shall have something worse than privation to dread, for scurvy has broken out at Intombi camp, where medical comforts are scarce, having been frittered away by the negligence or dishonesty of hospital attendants, over whom nobody seems to exercise proper control. The mismanagement of affairs there and the whole system of hospital administration at Ladysmith will have to be investigated after the siege. At noon to-day we had hopes that the Boer right flank was being hard pressed. That is the only practicable way in, but the effort has apparently not been pushed far. The heliograph has begun to blink out a long message, and that is always a bad sign.

February 8.—Small things assume an importance altogether out of proportion just now, and one worries about a last pipe of tobacco when issues of vital moment to us are being fought out ten miles off. I have come to the end of mine, and there is no more to be got for love or money. A ton of Kaffir leaf has just been requisitioned from coolies, who were selling it at twelve shillings the pound to soldiers, and who have now to accept a twelfth of that price. There are thus thirty-six thousand ounces for distribution, but even that quantity will not last long. Nobody would have the heart to take any of it from soldiers who have been reduced for weeks past to smoking dried sun-flower leaves and even tea-leaves. Six shots were fired from Bulwaan battery this afternoon after a silence of nearly two days. We generally accept such sudden outbursts as indicating that something has gone wrong with our enemies elsewhere, but we can see no signs of hurried movement among them, and though General Buller's guns have been active half the day they sound no nearer. A long message was heliographed through just before sunset, and rumours of ill news are whispered about with bated breath by people who wish to establish a reputation for early knowledge, but at the risk of being charged before a court-martial with the dissemination of news calculated to cause despondency. We had a case of that kind the other day when Foss, the champion swimmer of South Africa, was rightly convicted and

sentenced to imprisonment for deprecating the skill of our generals in conversation with soldiers. Tommy may hold his own opinions on that point, but he resents hearing them expressed for him through a pro-Boer mouthpiece, and this man may consider himself lucky to escape summary chastisement as a preliminary to the durance vile which is intended to be a wholesome warning for others of like tendency.

And indeed the garrison and civilians of Ladysmith, who now began to feel the sharp pinch of hunger, had need to silence any whose voices might be raised to rob them of their attenuated hopes. No official statement had yet been made on the subject, but it was already becoming evident that they had yet a time of painful waiting before relief could come. To the hundred days which they had trusted might complete the period of their trial a score were to be added before their sufferings could be forgotten in the joy of deliverance.

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CHAPTER XII

AFTER ONE HUNDRED DAYS

Boer pæan of victory—Rations cut down—Sausage without mystery—The "helio" moves east—Sick and dying at Intombi—Famine prices at market—Laughter quits the camps—A kindly thing by the enemy—Good news at last—Heroes in tatters—The distant tide of battle—Pulse-like throb of rifles—Two sons for the Empire—British infantry on Monte Cristo—Boer ambulances moving north—"'Ave you 'eard the noos?"—Rations increased—Bulwaan strikes his tents—"With a rifle and a red cross"—Buller "going strong"—Cronje's surrender—A sorry celebration—"A beaten army in full retreat"—"Puffing Billy" dismantled—General Buller's message—Relief at hand.

SIR REDVERS BULLER'S third attempt to force his way through to Ladysmith failed on 8th February, when he withdrew his forces from Vaalkranz to the south side of the Tugela. Their success was announced by the Boers about Ladysmith in their own way. At half-past two on the morning of 9th February, night was rent by the sudden glare of a search-light from Bulwaan, and soon came the scream of shells hurtling over the town. It was the Boer pæan of victory, and it sent the people hurrying to their underground refuges, to which the unco' guid had given the name of "funk-holes," but did no damage. Its purport was half-divined by the defenders. The news was still said to be good, but there were head-shakings, and

even the stoutest optimism found itself unequal to the strain when it was announced that rations were to be cut down. If things were going well, "Why, in the name of success," asks Mr. Pearse in his notes for 9th February, "should our universal provider, Colonel Ward, take this occasion to reduce rations? We are now down to 1 lb. of meat, including horse, four ounces of mealie meal, four ounces of bread, with a sausage ration daily 'as far as possible.' Sausages may be mysteries elsewhere, but we know them here to be horse-flesh, highly spiced, and nothing more. Bread is a brown, 'clitty' mixture of mealie meal, starch, and the unknown. Vegetables we have none, except a so-called wild spinach that overgrew every neglected garden, and could be had for the taking until people discovered how precious it was. Tea is doled out at the rate of one-sixth of an ounce to each adult daily, or in lieu thereof, coffee mixed with mealie meal."

February 10 was the day which had been looked forward to as the one on which relief would arrive. It did not come, and though the messages flashed over the hills from the beleaguered town at the time were full of an heroic cheerfulness, the disappointment was hard to bear. For with rations reduced, with disease harvesting for death where fire and steel had failed, the defenders were now face to face with the grimmer realities of war. Yet hope was never absent, and never at any time did the stern determination to bid the enemy defiance to the last flicker or grow fainter. Mr. Pearse's diary for this period gives many details of the highest interest of the position in the town, and suggests the sufferings, while it does justice to the splendid spirit of the garrison :—

February 10.—Heliograph signals have been twinkling spasmodically, but their language is written

in a sealed book. We only know that these "helios" come not from kopjes this side of Tugela, nor from the former signal-station south of Potgieter's and Skiet's Drifts, as they did a few days ago, but from hills near Weenen, as in the months before Buller crossed the Tugela, thus indicating a retrograde movement. It may be a hopeful sign of communication with some flanking column away eastward, and therefore kept secret, but we have our doubts. Depression sets in again, and, as always happens when there is bad news or dread of it, the death-rate at Intombi Hospital camp has gone up to fifteen in a single day. Since the date of investment four hundred and eighty patients have died there from all causes. It does not seem a large proportion out of the eighteen thousand under treatment from time to time, but it is very high in view of the fact that we have only had thirty-six soldiers and civilians in all killed by the thousands of shells that have been hurled at us in fifteen weeks.

The market's sensitive pulse also shows that there is a suspicion of something wrong. Black tobacco in small quantities may still be had by those who care to pay forty-five shillings for a half-pound cake of it, as one Sybarite did to-day. A box of fifty inferior cigars sold for £6 : 10s., a packet of ten Virginia cigarettes for twenty-five shillings, and eggs at forty-eight shillings a dozen. Soldiers who cannot hope to supplement their meagre rations by private purchases at this rate stroll about the streets

languid, hungry, silent. There is no laughter among them.

February 12.—The enemy have done a courteous, kindly thing in allowing Mrs. Doveton, whose husband lies wounded and dying at Intombi, to pass through their lines. Not only so, but the General placed an ambulance-cart at her disposal, with an escort, from whom she received every mark of respectful sympathy. Yet Major Doveton was well known as one of their most strenuous opponents, a prominent member of the Reform Committee, and a leader who has played his part manfully in every fight where the Imperial Light Horse has been engaged. He was badly wounded among the band of heroes who held Waggon Hill.

February 13.—Good news at last. It comes by heliograph, telling us that Lord Roberts has entered the Free State with a large force, mainly of mounted troops and artillery, wherewith he hoped to relieve the pressure round Ladysmith in a few days.

This afternoon I paid a visit to Brigadier-General Hamilton in his tent beside the Manchesters on Cæsar's Camp. Through all the glorious history of their services in Flanders, the Peninsula, the Crimea, or Afghanistan, men of the gallant 63rd have never done harder work than on breezy Bester's Ridge, where they have furnished outposts and fatigue parties every day for four weary months. Is it any wonder that they are the raggedest, most weather-stained, and most unkempt crowd who ever played

the part of soldiers? There is not a whole shoe or a sound garment among them. They are ill-fed and overworked, yet they go to an extra duty cheerfully, knowing that their General has faith in their watchfulness and grit. All honour to them! Like "the dirty half-hundred" of Peninsular fame, they have been too busy to have time for washing and mending.

Kaffirs report that the Free State Boers are all trekking towards Van Reenan's.

This native report, true or false, marked the beginnings of a renewed hope that was not again to suffer defeat, but was now quickly to grow into the substantial expectation and the certainty of relief. Lord Roberts was already across the borders of the Free State, and simultaneously Sir Redvers Buller was preparing for his last attempt to roll back the burghers from the Tugela, and to break down the barrier so long maintained between his army and Ladysmith. His operations during the week following were watched with intense anxiety, but with growing confidence. On 20th February Mr. Pearse wrote the following:—

For a whole week daily we have heard the roar of artillery southward and westward along the Tugela, seen Lyddite shells bursting on Boer positions, and watched the signs of battle, from which we gather hope that slowly but surely Buller's army is drawing nearer to us, though by a different and harder road from the one it tried last. We know that for a whole week on end those troops have been fighting their way against entrenched

positions that might baulk the bravest soldiers, and still the roar of battle rolls our way, until between the muffled boom of heavy guns we can hear faintly the pulse-like throb of rifle volleys.

Amid all this strain, intent upon vital issues, one hardly takes note of trivialities. Even the daily bombardment seems of little importance, and nobody cares how many shots "Puffing Billy" fired yesterday. For me the strain is tightened by news heliographed this morning that another son has come round from Bulawayo and joined the relieving force as a lieutenant of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. I don't know whether pride or anxiety is paramount when I think of these two boys fighting their way towards me. Both are with Lord Dundonald's Irregular Horse, of which we have heard much from Kaffirs, who tell us that Thorneycroft's Rifles and the "Sakkabulu boys," who are now identified as the South African Light Horse, have been in the front of every fight. It may seem egotistical to let this personal note stand, but I take the incident to be an illustration of the spirit that animates English youth at this moment.

On Saturday (February 17) the artillery fire sounded far off on the other side of the Tugela. Next morning we could see shells bursting along the nearer crest of Monte Cristo, and up to eleven o'clock the fierce cannonade was ceaseless. How the action had ended we could only judge by Boer movements. From Observation Hill I saw their

ambulance waggons trekking heavy across the plain behind Rifleman's Ridge, then a bigger waggon, uncovered, drawn by a large span of oxen. There may have been a long gun in that waggon, its movements were so slow and cumbersome. Two ambulance waggons passed in the opposite direction, light and moving at a gallop.

Yesterday came news of General Buller's success in the capture of Cingolo Hill, but before it was signalled we had seen from Cæsar's Camp British infantry crowning the nearer ridge of Monte Cristo. They came up in column, and deployed with a steadiness that showed them to be masters of the position. In the evening I met Sir George White, who told me that he believed Sir Redvers had gained another success. To-day, again, shells from the southern guns have been bursting about ridges south of Cæsar's Camp, where the Boers are still in force. This afternoon, and well on to evening, we could hear the busy hum of field guns in action firing very rapidly, as if a fresh attack were about to develop. Sir Redvers is evidently resolved not to give the enemy any rest or time for fortifying other positions.

The above was written on 20th February. General Buller had captured Hlangwane Hill, the real key of the enemy's position, and on the following day the whole of Warren's Division crossed the Tugela by a pontoon bridge thrown across by the Royal Engineers. The significance of the fact was at once recognised at Ladysmith, and that day saw the last of the hated horse-flesh ration. Events

were now moving fast. The Boers were preparing for flight, hope began to beat high in the town, and already the memory of past sufferings and the irk of those still being borne seemed little in the light of oncoming deliverance. Mr. Pearse's notes at this last stage in the long stand for the Empire are interesting reading:—

February 22.—Trivialities are supreme after all. Yesterday we were all more jubilant at the announcement that horse-flesh would not be issued as rations again than on the score of General Buller's signal telling us he had driven the Boers from all their positions across the Tugela. To-day soldiers greeted each other with a cheery "'Ave you 'eard the noos? They say there'll be full rations to-day." An extra half-pound of meat, five biscuits instead of one and a quarter, and a few additional ounces of mealie meal, were more to them at that moment than a British victory.

February 23.—For several days past the naval 12-pounder on Cæsar's Camp has shelled Boers at work on the dam below Intombi Camp, causing much consternation. One result of this is that Bulwaan tries to keep down the 12-pounder's fire and leaves the town in comparative quiet. This afternoon there was another surprise for the Boers. "Lady Anne," one of the big twin sisters of the naval armament to which we owe so much, had not fired for just a month until she astonished the gunners on Bulwaan by planting a shell in their works to-day. They ran in all directions, not knowing where to

hide, and at the second shot bolted back across the hill. Their tents have disappeared from Bulwaan now. To-day a Boer, or rather a German fighting for the Boers, was caught by our patrols. He had a rifle, a bandolier, pockets full of cartridges, and a red-cross badge, concealed, but ready for use when fighting might be inconvenient.

February 26.—Yesterday numbers of Boers were seen retiring from Pieter's Station across the ridges towards Bester's Valley, but no sign of a general retreat yet beyond the report of scouts, who say that several guns have been seen going back at a gallop behind Bulwaan, followed by nearly two hundred waggons. Last night we heard rifle-firing on the ridges south of Cæsar's Camp and Waggon Hill. It sounded so near that for a time we thought our own outposts were engaged with the enemy. Kaffirs say this was a Boer attack on Pieter's Station, but their story is not confirmed. General Buller heliographs that he is still going strong, but the country is difficult and progress slow. Lord Roberts, according to another helio-signal, has Cronje surrounded. Two attempts to relieve him have been frustrated. All this puts new life into the garrison here. A newspaper telegram was also heliographed announcing that Cronje had surrendered with 6000 men, after losing 1700 killed and wounded. This is probably a bit of journalistic enterprise in anticipation of events.

February 27.—Majuba Day. We expected the

Boers to celebrate it at daybreak or before by a salute of shotted guns, but they are silent, apparently watching as we watch, and awaiting the issue of events elsewhere. We know that a fierce fight is raging not twelve miles distant. The thuds of big guns are frequent, we hear the booming of field artillery in salvos, and the shrill ripple of rifles is almost incessant. But our view is narrowed by hills, and we can only see shells bursting on the crests of Grobelaar's Kloof and about flat-topped Table Hill. From their commanding position on Bulwaan the Boers can overlook Pieter's Station to the earthworks that girdle Grobelaar's Kloof, and part of the road by which our troops must advance from Colenso if they advance at all. Noon passed without any Majuba Day salute, but an hour later Bulwaan battery fired twelve shots up Bester's Valley at cattle and men cutting grass, then turned to shell Cove Ridge and Observation Hill, on which one of Captain Christie's howitzers had been mounted during the night. Thus they made up a salute of twenty-one guns. "Puffing Billy" seemed bent on showing what he could do. Three shells burst near where I stood, on the extreme western shoulder of Observation Hill, just missing the howitzer, and one went far beyond the longest range yet reached by any of the enemy's Creusots. For a long time I watched Boer movements, and saw their waggons hurrying back in some confusion from the Helpmakaar road across Conrad Pieter's farm towards Elandslaagte.

At night came a signal from General Buller, "Doing well," followed by a longer message announcing that Cronje was a prisoner in Lord Roberts's camp, having surrendered with all his army unconditionally this morning. Hurrahs are ringing through every camp at this news. Majuba Day has brought glad tidings to us after all!

February 28.—The fortune of war is on our side now. Every sign points to that conclusion. Ladysmith was alarmed soon after midnight by what seemed to civilians the beginning of another attack. Rifles rang out sharply round the whole of our positions. The furious outburst began on Gun Hill. Surprise Hill took it up. It ran along the dongas in which Boer pickets lie hidden, and was carried on to the south beyond Bester's Valley. Our troops did not fire a shot, but still the fusillade continued for half an hour. The Boers were evidently in a state of nervous excitement, brought on by nothing more formidable than twelve men of the Gloucesters who, under Lieutenant Thesbit, had gone out to destroy a laager at the foot of Limit Hill. This incident showed clearly enough that no news had come from Colenso to give our enemies confidence. Few of us, however, were prepared for the sight that met our eyes as we looked from Observation Hill across the broad plain towards Blaauwbank when the mists of morning cleared. There we saw Boer convoys trekking northward from the Tugela past Spion Kop in columns miles long. Others emerged

from the defile by Underbrook like huge serpents twining about the hillsides. Waggons were crowded together by hundreds. If one could not go fast enough it had to fall out of the road, making way for others. Above them hung dense dust clouds. Elsewhere in the open, dust whirled in thinner, higher wreaths above groups of horsemen hurrying off in confusion, and paying no heed to the straits of their transport. A beaten army in full retreat if I have ever seen one! Still people doubted and grew uneasy, because of General Buller's silence. Bulwaan fired a single shot by way of parting salute, and then a tripod was rigged up for lifting "Puffing Billy" from his carriage. It was a bold thing to do in broad daylight, and our naval 12-pounders made short work of it by battering the tripod over. After that a steady fire was kept up on the battery to prevent, if possible, the Boers from moving their guns.

Afternoon sunshine enabled General Buller to heliograph the reassuring message for which Ladysmith had been waiting so anxiously. He said: "I beat the enemy thoroughly yesterday, and am sending my cavalry on as fast as very bad roads will admit to ascertain where they are going. I believe the enemy to be in full retreat."

It was even so. General Buller and his gallant army, by dint of heroic qualities, with an unshakable determination which faltered before nothing; with a patient endurance which bore all things unmurmuringly; with a

sublime courage face to face with the enemy which has earned them the often unwilling praise of the world, had overcome at last. On the night of 28th February, when the above note was written, the head of the relief column, under Lord Dundonald, arrived in the town.

CHAPTER XIII

RELIEF AT LAST

The beginning of the end—Buller's last advance—Heroic Inniskillings—The coming of Dundonald—A welcome at Klip River Drift—A weather-stained horseman—The Natal troopers—Cheers and tears—A grand old General—Sir George White's address—"Thank God, we have kept the flag flying!"—"God save the Queen"—Arrival of Buller—Looking backward—Within four days of starvation—Horseflesh a mere memory—Eight hundred sick and wounded—A word in tribute—Conclusion.

THE beginning of the end had come on 13th February, when General Buller's army of relief had opened the attack on Hussar Hill. From that day fighting had been fierce and practically continuous, the enemy giving way only after the most stubborn resistance, and taking advantage of every opportunity to make a stand. During that fortnight over 2000 officers and men of General Buller's force paid the price of their dauntless courage; and in all the glorious story no page is brighter than that which puts on undying record the devoted gallantry of the Inniskillings, who were, to all practical intents, wiped out in attacking Pieter's Hill, the last bar across the road to Ladysmith, on the 23rd. Wounded and dying and dead lay out together uncomforted, uncared for throughout the long hours of Saturday until Sunday morning, when a truce was agreed to. Still the hill was not won, and was to be held by the

enemy until the 27th, the nineteenth anniversary of Majuba, a day no longer to be held in shameful memory. On the following day the Boers were in full retreat; and Lord Dundonald, with a small body of mounted troops, made a dash across the hills to Ladysmith. Their coming was hailed by the long-isolated town with the wildest outbursts of delight. Its effect is graphically suggested by Mr. Pearse in a number of jottings in his diary on the same night:—

As night closes in there are cheers rolling towards us from the plain beyond Klip River, where our volunteers are on patrol. Ladysmith, so quiet and undemonstrative in its patient endurance of a long siege, goes wild at the sound. Everybody divines its meaning. Our friends from the victorious army of the south are coming! All the town rushes out to meet them, where they must cross a drift. The voices of strong men break into childish treble as they try to cheer, women laugh and cry by turns, and all crowd about the troopers of Lord Dundonald's escort, giving them such a welcome as few victors from the battlefield have ever known. The hour of our deliverance has come. After a hundred and twenty-two days of bombardment—a hundred and nineteen of close investment—the Siege of Ladysmith is at an end. What a hero our gallant old General is to all of us, when he rides forward to greet Lord Dundonald, and how voices tremble with deep thankfulness while we sing "God Save the Queen"!

In a letter written on the following day, Mr. Pearse describes in greater detail the arrival of relief, and summarises his impressions at the time :—

LADYSMITH, *March* 1.—The relieving force joined hands with us last night, and Ladysmith gave itself away to an outburst of wild enthusiasm at the sight of troops so long expected and so often heard fighting in the distance, that some despondent people had almost begun to think they would never come. After the roar of battle ceased on Tuesday, we knew by signs that could not be mistaken that Sir Redvers Buller had gained a great victory even before the heliograph flashed to us the glad tidings in his own words. I had come to the conclusion, watching from Observation Hill, soon after daybreak on Wednesday morning, and seeing the enemy's convoys in three columns, miles long, trekking northwards, that they were in full retreat. Their guns were hurrying to the rear also, and horsemen in scattered groups, to the number of thousands, were galloping past positions on which some stand might still have been made, a sure sign that they were beaten and did not mean to rally. But the best indication of all was the attempt to remove the big gun from Bulwaan that has shelled us persistently and destructively for a hundred and twelve days, causing us much anxiety but comparatively small loss of life. Our artillery of the Naval Brigade, to which Ladysmith owes a deep debt of gratitude, tried to prevent the guns from being carried off, but apparently their admirably

aimed and accurate fire was too late to effect that object.

Just before nightfall Sir Redvers Buller's cavalry were reported in sight. The first token of their coming were loud cheers away on the plain towards Intombi neutral camp, where some of Colonel Dartnell's Frontier Police, with Border Mounted Rifles and Natal Carbineers, had been patrolling since early morning. With joy on their faces, and many with tears in their eyes, the people rushed towards a drift by which the Klip River must be crossed. There General Brocklehurst was waiting, and as a horseman, weather-stained and begrimed by days of bivouacking, floundered from deep water on to the slippery bank, he was received with a hearty hand-grip and welcomed to Ladysmith. Then loud cheers went up for Lord Dundonald, commander of the Second Cavalry Brigade, whose irregular horsemen have made for themselves a great name as scouts. We have often heard from Kaffirs about ubiquitous troopers who were described as wearing sakkabulu feathers in their hats and carrying assegais. We were all anxious to see these men, and I especially had often looked out for them, since some one had told me that they were the South African Light Horse, in which, as I think I have mentioned elsewhere, a son of mine commands a troop. We had heard of them and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry in the thick of the fight at Spion Kop, and in many other affairs, but only one came with Lord

Dundonald and the advance guard, in which were Imperial Light Horse, Carbineers, Natal Police of the Frontier Field Force, and Border Mounted Rifles, numbering only one hundred and seventy, under Major Mackenzie. They had pushed forward after the last feeble resistance of the Boer rearguard was overcome, and Lord Dundonald brought to Sir George White the good news that Ladysmith's relief was accomplished.

The crowd of soldiers and civilians shouted itself hoarse in cheering Sir George White when he came with the object of meeting Lord Dundonald. He could not get through this crowd outside the gaol, where Boer prisoners were standing on the balcony curious to know what all this commotion might mean. When a lull gave him an opportunity of speaking, he said in a voice trembling with emotion, but clear and soldierly for all that:—

"I thank you men, one and all, from the bottom of my heart, for the help and support you have given to me, and I shall always acknowledge it to the end of my life. It grieved me to have to cut your rations, but I promise you that I will not do it again. I thank God we have kept the flag flying."

Three cheers were given for Sir Redvers Buller and General Sir Archibald Hunter, and then the whole crowd joined in singing "God Save the Queen," with an effect that was strangely impressive in the circumstances. This morning, after a reconnaissance had been sent out to watch the enemy's

retirement, and if possible intercept convoys, Sir Redvers Buller with his staff rode into town and met Sir George White before any demonstration could be made in his honour, and after remaining at headquarters a short time only, he rode back to camp, or rather bivouac, with the troops who had fought so heroically under him for the honour of England.

Only those who have been under siege and so closely invested that all communications with the outer world, except through Kaffir runners, were cut off for 119 days, can imagine what the first sight of a relieving column means to the beleaguered garrison. Happily such experiences have been rare in the history of British campaigns, and nobody here would care to repeat them, though all are proud enough now of having seen it through. Those who went away while they had a chance in the first rush for safety, when shells began to burst in the town, may claim credit for foresight, but we do not envy them. All hardships, dangers, and privations seem light now that they are things of the past. Our enthusiasm in welcoming the first detachment of the relieving force has swept away the impression of discomforts, and, for a time at least, induced us to forget everything except the reflected honour that is ours in having suffered with British troops.

Relief had come none too soon. Mr. Pearse, who had weathered the storm unscathed and in good

health, on 1st March stated in a telegram that when Lord Dundonald's troops arrived in the town only four days' full rations were available, and there were 800 sick and wounded in hospital, by far the larger proportion being down with dysentery and enteric fever. Truly it seemed that deliverance had come in the nick of time. "Thank God," Sir George White had said, "we have kept the flag flying." Thank God also that the brave defenders had been spared the worst horrors of a siege, and that help had not longer been withheld in their extremity. Only a concluding word remains to be said. On 6th February, when relief seemed imminent, Mr. Pearse wrote the following in his diary:—

In this moment I want to place it on record how cordially we all recognise the fact that Sir George White has done everything that an able commander could do, not only for the defence of a town whose inhabitants are entrusted to his charge, but also for the larger issues of a campaign that might have been seriously jeopardised by any false move on his part. In many respects, when his critics, including myself, thought he lacked the enterprise of a great leader, events have proved that his more cautious course was right. If mistakes were made at the outset they have been nobly atoned for.

All who have so far followed Mr. Pearse through his brilliant pages will acclaim his words. Such a commander was worthy of such troops, and they no less worthy. During the whole dreary four months of the siege they had proved themselves men in whom any General in the world and any people might feel an exultant pride. In long days

of wearisome monotony, broken only by the scream and thud and burst of shells, at noon beneath the fierce glow of the African sun, at night in the sodden trenches, in season and out, they had been patient, vigilant, ready, bearing all things, braving all things, hoping all things and always. In the midnight attack through dark defiles and over rugged heights, where the broken boulders made every step a toil and a danger, they trod with a grim tenacity of purpose, and struck with a daring that wrested a tribute from the unaccustomed lips of their enemy. On the rocky ridges of Waggon Hill and Cæsar's Camp, when the burghers in one supreme effort dashed against them the pick and pride of the commandos, they fought through the hours of night till dawn gave place to day, and the daylight waxed and waned, with a dogged, half-despairing courage that laughed to scorn even the regardless valour of a worthy foeman. Who shall do justice to soldiers like these? Wherever, and as long as, the fame of the British arms is cherished, so long, and as widely, will the story of the defence of Ladysmith be held in glorious memory.

THE END

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MILITARY MAP OF LADYSMITH

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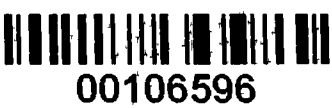

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